DEC 2011/JAN 2012
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THE PEOPLE'S WATCHDOG

ESTS
artphones
tcases
o hose reels
table air cons
right stoves
camcorders
dia players
ety gates

Summer's a cinch

The season's best barbies, seafood, TVs and fridges

HAPPY NEW YOU
How to stick to this year's resolutions

INTEREST FREE
Mind the fees and charges

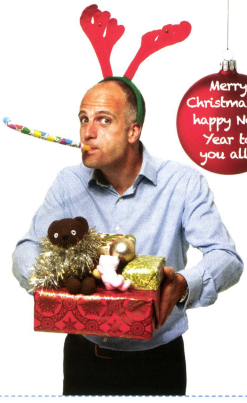
CREDIT CARD EXTRAS
Travel insurance in your back pocket

413 products reviewed!

Look back and laugh

2011 has seen some milestones in consumer rights worth celebrating – and next year looks promising too.

When one year ends and another begins, we often like to reminisce. I usually refrain from this, but I think this year has been too momentous for consumers to let it pass without a few words.



We are constantly striving to add value for our members. While other media have reduced costs, we've invested in more content and pages to the magazine for every issue. We've met more members than ever before through roadshows and other events around the country. We've held 27 lab tours, at each of which I've relished the chance to talk to you about the issues that are close to your hearts. Please make it your New Year's resolution to join us for a tour – they're free for members.

You've told us that country of origin and traffic light labelling are important, and we've campaigned for these to be made clearer. We've also had a win with the ban on mortgage exit fees, easier bank account switching, the RBA review of credit card surcharges and a world-first group switch of mortgages. I'm also delighted that after years of campaigning by CHOICE, Australia now has nationwide uniform consumer rights. To find out more, please download the CHOICE Annual Review at choice.com.au/annualreview11, which details in full all of our activities over the past 12 months.

2011 has been the year not just for talking but also for actually doing something about the banking system. In this issue, hot on the heels of the 40,000 Australians who registered for the CHOICE Big Bank Switch, our annual bank satisfaction survey (page 25) reinforces the importance of a better deal with banks for our members.

Our Better Banking Campaign continues to put the spotlight on the Australian banking sector and lets consumers know which institutions are prepared to put them first. From the middle of next year the new one-step account switching process will make it easier for consumers to act.

This is the time of year when we all spend too much, and some of us eat and drink too much too! You'll be pleased to know we don't want to curtail any fun, but we do aim to make your life easier and to help you buy smart this silly season. If you think a friend or family member might benefit from our support as well, consider giving them a life-changing CHOICE subscription membership (see page 28 for more).

On behalf of everyone here at CHOICE I wish you and your family a merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

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CHOICE. The People's Watchdog

CHOICE gives you the power to choose the very best goods and services, and avoid the worst. We pay full price for all the products we test, so we remain 100% independent. We don't take advertising and we don't accept freebies from industry. We're not a government body and our consumer publishing and advocacy is almost entirely funded by subscriptions to our magazines, **www.choice.com.au** and from other services we supply to benefit members and consumers. CHOICE product ratings are based on lab tests, expert assessments and consumer surveys. CHOICE staff also research a wide range of consumer services. They reveal the truth behind the facts and figures, and investigate the quality and the claims.

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Make sure your NY resolutions don't become a headache – see page 29

CHOICE's Kate Browne can help you keep your 2012 resolutions

Coming out in the wash?

While you might think you're doing the right thing by using ocean-friendly laundry detergent, your clothes could be the polluting culprit no matter what you wash them in.

Synthetic clothing may be a significant source of tiny pieces of plastic that are accumulating in the marine environment, according to a recent Australian study. Researchers from the University of Sydney found that a single garment cleaned in a domestic washing machine could produce more than 1900 fibres per wash, which could end up in sewage.

The proportions of polyester and acrylic fibres in clothing were found to resemble those in effluent on beaches and at sewage disposal sites. This suggests that the washing of clothes – rather than fragmentation or cleaning products – could be the primary source of the debris. The research team concluded washing machine and clothing designers should consider the need to reduce the release of fibres into waste water. **KATE BROWNE**

Claim your ca$h

ASIC's search facility has seen a jump in activity as consumers search for a share of $636 million in unclaimed bank account funds. With the largest chunk at just under $1 million and the average parcel about $652, it can be worth the chase. Last year Aussies laid claim to some $62 million. Visit edge.asic.gov.au/unclaimed/simplequery.html.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

Keeping in cheque

Last time in Talkback, we asked whether you still use cheques. While many of you use them far less frequently, only one person reported no longer using them at all.

"I cancelled my cheques more than seven years ago while still running a small business," says David from Tongala, Vic. "I have since paid all accounts by EFTPOS, direct debit or cash."

When we asked a similar question online, about half of respondents said they didn't use cheques. But many of you told us that cheques are still important to you. Some use them to pay most of your bills as you don't have easy access to internet banking or credit cards. Several have concerns about credit card and internet security. As Peter from Brunswick, Vic, notes, "I gave up internet transactions when my institution decided that any failure of their equipment or systems would be counted as my failure and I would be responsible for the consequences."

Many others noted that cheques are important for infrequent or very large payments, in particular for paying tradespeople and making donations to charity. Another important issue raised is the added risk protection provided when cheques require two signatories. This simple risk management strategy is being used by community groups, clubs, body corporates, and in one case to exercise a joint power of attorney over an elderly parent's finances. **ELIZABETH McNESS**

TALK BACK

How happy are you with the variety and quality of brands available on supermarket shelves? Let us know what you think about this – email talkback@choice.com.au, or visit us on Facebook or Twitter.

BREAKING NEWS

Even shonkier

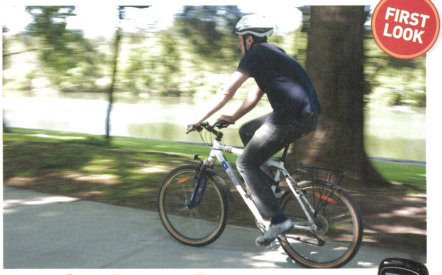
The ACCC has announced a recall of the Go4Green EnergySmart device due to the risk of an electric shock. Go4Green, which was dishonoured with one of this year's Shonky Awards (see *CHOICE*, November 2011), emits a zap when both pins are touched after the product is unplugged, as one unlucky CHOICE staffer also discovered. Consumers should return the product to the place of purchase for a full refund – just as well, as it's about as effective as snake oil.

Eye on the prize

Hot on the heels of 2011 Shonky winner SensaSlim, a new diet spray is due to hit the shelves early 2012. Marketed by Chika Health, a company founded by former NSW Opposition Leader Kerry Chikarovski, Supprexxa Metabolism Kick comes with Fat Burner Max capsules. However, none of the ingredients have been shown to produce clinically meaningful weight loss.

At the chol face

Disturbing new clinical guidelines in the US now recommend that all children aged between nine and 11 have their blood cholesterol levels checked to identify those at risk of cardiovascular disease.



Two for the road

Cycling enthusiasts often want to keep notes on the tracks they take, and some gadgets can help. The MyNav Bike Pro 700 uses a GPS signal to track your movement on supplied Australian maps. The lighter, more basic Garmin Edge 200 doesn't display maps, but logs your movement to its GPS signal for perusal online. The 700 comes with some spoken directions; the Edge only gives speed, distance and time.

Both affix to the stem of a bicycle, but the 700 is fiddly to attach. Its optional extras such as a speed sensor and cadence sensor, which measures the wheel's revolutions by pedal turns, require special attachment. The cadence sensor and a heart-rate monitor are wireless, but getting the system to recognise both is hit and miss – we weren't able to get the heart-rate monitor working. And if you're expecting the display and speed of car GPS technology, the expensive 700 disappoints. Scrolling can be slow, and the resistive touchscreen, while accurate, works best with fingernails. The menu system isn't intuitive either.

MYNAV 700 BIKE PRO
PRICE $799
CONTACT www.mynav.com
★★☆☆☆

GARMIN EDGE 200
PRICE $149
CONTACT garmin.com.au
★★★½☆

Using the 700 on a bicycle is easy if you just want to track yourself on a map, which it displays on the go. You can switch to 3D mapping or cycling variables such as speed (if you purchase the speed sensor) or odometer.

Recording your route is simple with both products. With the 700 you can review trip history on the device, or transfer it to a PC with supplied software. Trips recorded on the Edge can only be reviewed on your PC with Garmin's online software.

CHOICE verdict

We only recommend the MN700 for those who have patience and deep pockets for the extras that make it work properly. For those who want a simple GPS device for their bike, consider the Edge or using one of myriad cycling phone apps.

MATTHEW STEEN

Group notice

NSW Fair Trading has announced it's working with other consumer protection agencies to deal with a recent spike in complaints relating to group buying sites (see *CHOICE*, December 2010/January 2011).

"The majority of complaints involve non- or partial supply of goods and services, failure to provide refunds where consumers believe they should be, and goods and services that are not fit for purpose," said Fair Trading Minister Anthony Roberts.

The Australian Direct Marketing Association and the Australian Interactive Media Industry Association have released the voluntary Australian Group Buying Code of Conduct, which outlines several best practice principles. Signatories to the code include Cudo, Groupon, Jump On It, LivingSocial, Ouffer, Spreets, OurDeal and Scoopon.

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH

Aussies meet their maker

If you buy a piece of clothing with Made in Australia on the label you may assume it's been made under the best conditions. In reality, however, tens of thousands of Australian clothing and footwear home workers are earning as little as $4 an hour in poor conditions to make shoes and clothes that sell for hundreds of dollars.

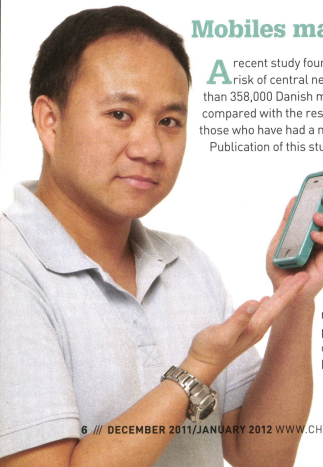
To help consumers identify Australian clothes produced by workers paid award rates and working in suitable conditions, Ethical Clothing Australia has launched the "Meet your maker" campaign. Look for the Ethical Clothing Australia trademark or visit meetyourmaker.org.au. KATE BROWNE

The price of freedom

ACMA has called for a change to the system so all callers are treated equally when dialling 1800, 1300 or 13 numbers. As it stands, calls to 1800 numbers from a landline are free but 1300 and 13 calls are usually charged at the same rate as an untimed local call – a flat fee of about 30 cents. In contrast, your service provider sets rates for "free" calls from mobiles. It's easy to get stung – for example, you may need to call a cab when away from a landline.

In other telecom news, Digital Economy Minister Stephen Conroy announced the government is looking into whether to keep price controls on fixed-line services. The controls are designed to protect the interests of low-income and regional users.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN



Mobiles may not fry brain

A recent study found there was no increase in the risk of central nervous system tumours in more than 358,000 Danish mobile phone subscribers when compared with the rest of the population – even in those who have had a mobile for over 10 years.

Publication of this study comes five months after the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classified mobiles as "possibly carcinogenic to humans". The IARC maintains evidence is still limited and that more research on long-term heavy phone use is needed to completely rule out a link between mobile use and cancer.

JANE BARDELL

$71.8m

The estimated spend on Australian group buying deals in the first three months of 2011

$123.9m

The estimated spend in the second quarter of 2011

Telsyte

Big Brother is watching you shop

The use of cameras by retailers to spy on a customer's shopping habits may be legal, despite concerns raised about privacy.

According to Melbourne's *Herald Sun* newspaper, retailers are using surveillance technology to track how shoppers interact with stores. But Lemm Ex, Principal Privacy Officer at the Office of the Information Commissioner Queensland, says they're within their rights to do so.

"Generally, it's not unlawful to film anyone on private property or in a public space," says Ex. "They have to make people aware of cameras, but they don't have to actively do it. A sign is sufficient but they don't need to broadcast it over the PA."

Acting NSW Privacy Commissioner John McAteer says any surveillance comes down to consent. "You need to be able to opt out when you enter a store, and have the choice to leave."

ADAM GLYDE

Whoops

- In Breaking News, *CHOICE* October 2011 (page 5), we referred to the superannuation reforms of MySuper as "government-run". These changes are better described as government-endorsed.
- The suggestion in Hard Word, *CHOICE* November 2011, that HSBC's advertised home loan comparison rate was an error was off the mark. Lenders are required to provide a comparison rate, which includes fees and charges, when they advertise fixed-term credit. In this instance, the variable rate and comparison rate were the same: 6.79%.
- Also in November, our CFL and LED lamp test table (page 64) had some incorrect scores. The Black & Gold BG15W-1ES scored 70% for 2000-hour luminosity and 76% overall, while the Sparsam Low Energy Bulb 30149453 scored 80% for initial luminosity and 76% overall.

Robot rescue

A new rapid-fire testing robot is being used by the US Environmental Protection Agency to help characterise the bioactivity of 10,000 previously untested agricultural and industrial chemicals and food additives. The technique should provide more information on chemical toxicity in the next few years than has been discovered in the past century.

In Australia, the National Industrial Chemicals Notification and Assessment Scheme is currently reforming to include collaborations and information exchange with chemical regulators overseas.

ELISE DALLEY

Burning issues

Summer means holidays, swimming and barbecues. It can also mean burns, and it's important to know how to treat one. However, recent research published in the *Medical Journal of Australia* showed although 82% of people surveyed knew to cool a burn with water, fewer than 10% knew how long to leave the burn under running water. Keeping it in cool, moving water for 20 minutes lessens the depth of the burn and speeds healing, which in turn can reduce or avoid scarring.

10%
of people know the correct way to treat a burn

Never use ice, iced water, toothpaste, butter, creams or ointments – these don't cool the burn and can do more harm than good.

KATE BROWNE

Cue reforms

The US Institute of Medicine (IOM) has released a highly anticipated report from the second stage of its study of front-of-pack (FoP) nutrition rating systems. The IOM was asked to undertake the research by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at the direction of US Congress.

The report recommends that a government-sponsored FoP system must encourage consumers to make healthier choices about the food they purchase. Significantly, the report found that a signal or cue was essential to a FoP system's effectiveness rather than detailed nutritional information. This is incompatible with the daily intake guides favoured by many in the US and Australian food industries.

While the panel ultimately suggested a star rating system, its recommendations in favour of an interpretative system are consistent with the traffic light system used by CHOICE and recommended by the independent, expert panel that reviewed food labelling in Australia.

ANGELA MCDOUGALL

You haven't won

Australians have been warned to ignore a letter claiming they've won $15,000 and asking for an initial payment of $25 paid by cheque or credit card. The letter looks official, includes a prepaid envelope and mentions an international organisation based in the USA, but it is a scam.

UTA MIHM

The case of the missing hot water

On a recent trip home from a European holiday, my partner and I were in transit for almost 30 hours. Midway through the trip we were stuck in Beijing Airport. We cleared customs and wandered into the transit terminal, where we were greeted by the sweetest sign – "showers".

After umm-ing and ahh-ing over the $25 per person charge, we decided to take the plunge – the thought of a long, hot, high pressure soak was too tempting to pass up. We handed over the credit card.

> No amount of half-price massage offers were going to sway me

Once inside the cubicle I blasted the hot water, waiting for that sweet rush of steam. And waited, and waited and waited. Thinking it must be broken, I dragged my clothes back on and headed back to the front desk with my partner, who had also been doused in a lukewarm spray.

We raised our issues with a friendly-looking desk clerk.

"There is no hot water in Beijing Airport," she said. In other words, I'd just forked out $50 for a lukewarm shower.

I asked for a refund, but the clerk was more interested in offering us useless contra deals. "Let's split the difference," she said. "You can use a suite in our hotel for an hour."

"Does the suite have a hot shower?" I asked.

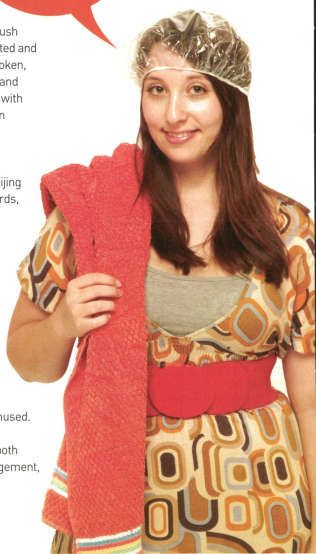
"There's no hot water in Beijing Airport," she said, bemused. "But you can watch TV."

After trying to reason with both the reception clerk and management, I realised there was only one option left. I told the desk clerk that I would either get my refund then and there, or I'd get it back the moment I landed in Sydney when I'd be on the phone to my credit card company to reverse the transaction. Finally, they understood I was serious and that no amount of half-price massage offers were going to sway me.

"OK. But no one has had a problem with it before."

It seems there's no shortage of bedraggled travellers who'll pay good money for a bad shower.

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH



Dodgy bonanza

In the six months to August this year, the ACCC recalled or removed more than 95,000 products deemed unsafe for Australian consumers.

More than 1300 retailers and 3800 product lines were inspected, with Dimmeys and Fantastic Furniture among those issued with substantial fines for non-compliant products.

With Christmas fast approaching and the ACCC currently surveying toy's and children's products, the watchdog warns it will continue to take action against those who breach standards. **ELISE DALLEY**

Ripper reader

There are no disadvantages to reading on electronic devices such as e-readers and tablets compared with traditional printed text in terms of reading speed and information processing. That's a key finding of a study undertaken by researchers at Germany's Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz. In fact, older participants were found to read faster using a tablet computer. **SAM BUTLER**

Baby girl trouble

Exposure to bisphenol A in the womb could impact the behaviour of girls, according to a US study. Researchers measured urine levels of BPA – a compound used in the manufacture of some drink bottles and can linings – of 244 mothers during pregnancy and at childbirth. Mothers subsequently assessed their child's behaviour at three years of age. Increasing gestational BPA levels were linked to increasing levels of anxiety, depression and hyperactivity in girls. **RACHEL CLEMONS**

FIRST LOOK

Make your own midi

The Beer Machine makes 10L of beer at a time. The kit contains a two-piece barrel-shaped container fitted with a pressure gauge and stand, and six clamps that hold the two sections together. It also comes with a beer tap, pressure control valve, three 8g food- grade carbon dioxide cartridges, a pilsner beer mix, and yeast. For about $14 you can buy different mixes depending on the type of beer you like, such as Canadian Red or Czech Pilsner, and you'll also need extra carbon dioxide cartridges for further batches (a single batch needs 2-3 cartridges – $8 for 10).

Assembling the kit requires strong hands, as the seal that fits between the two container parts is hard to compress, making the clamps difficult to push in place. Just before you make beer, screw in a carbon dioxide cartridge that'll then carbonate the beer after fermentation.

Making beer is easy: add three litres of water, pour in the malt, add more water, sprinkle in the yeast and seal the system. Leave the container in a room with a constant temperature of 20°C-22°C. Fermentation should finish in five days, at which point you place the container in the fridge for another four or five days for the beer to mature and clarify.

We asked 32 staff members to blind taste-test the home brew against a commercially made pilsener. They rated the home brew 2.3 out of 5 and the commercial beer 3.2.

CHOICE verdict

The best part of using this kit is that you don't need to bottle or keg the beer, unlike beer fermented in a traditional kit. So no more exploding bottles in the back of the pantry at 2am. **PETER HORVATH**

THE BEER MACHINE
PRICE $130
CONTACT beermachine.com

★★★☆☆

More than a toothache

The federal government has warned parents of the danger posed by amber teething necklaces and bracelets for infants, which the ACCC has found to be a possible strangulation or choking hazard. Proponents of the devices say amber releases healing oils that enter the bloodstream through the skin and calm teething babies. The ACCC and the TGA are looking into these therapeutic claims. **ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH**

Member spotlight

Introducing CHOICE member Jan Wilkinson. She has two children and four grandchildren. Her first job was in a public hospital, which she juggled with university study. She then moved into public hospital management. Jan retired in August 2011.

Jan Wilkinson with two of her grandchildren

Why did you join CHOICE?

I became aware of CHOICE through the hospital and was so impressed with the magazine, I decided to subscribe when I married and was getting a home together.

What section of *CHOICE* do you read first and why?

I always start with the Hard Word and have a laugh. Next I look at products. I like to keep up with what's available and the criteria CHOICE has used in testing.

Have you made any CHOICE recommended purchases?

I purchased a Miele W5903 WPS washing machine in June this year. CHOICE marked down this machine because it did not have a cold wash, but as I have solar hot water I do not wash in cold. I am very pleased with it.

Do you recommend products to family and friends?

My daughter often rings me to check what CHOICE said about a planned purchase.

Which CHOICE campaigns have you found to be most important to you?

The food labelling campaign! I just about go blind trying to read small print. Clear labelling of country of origin is important, as well as nutrition information.

Which product/s would you like to see CHOICE put to the test?

I very much enjoy classical music and ballet and envisage buying surround speakers, so would like to see some current information on sound systems.

Tell us about your CHOICE experiences – become our next Member in the Spotlight! Send us an email at inthespotlight@choice.com.au.

CHOICE is the perfect gift

Not sure what to buy this Christmas? Give the gift of CHOICE membership – see page 28 for details.

Swap unwanted gifts for a BBQ

Have you ever received a Christmas gift that left you wondering "Why did they waste their money"?

As a CHOICE member you know how to buy smart this silly season, but many people don't. If you've been on the receiving end of a Christmas dud, email us at member@choice.com.au and if yours is the worst we'll give you a barbecue.

Please include a photo of the gift, your name, daytime or mobile phone number, and a description in 25 words or less.

Our CHOICE panel will review all entries and select four finalists, who will appear on the website at choice.com.au/unwantedgift. Members can cast their votes for the Most Unwanted Christmas Gift, and the one with the most will win. The lucky winner will receive:

- a CHOICE Best Buy barbecue, and
- a CHOICE Plus quarterly gift subscription.

The three runners-up will receive a quarterly gift subscription to CHOICE Plus, for themselves or a friend.

Terms and conditions apply – please refer to choice.com.au/unwantedgift for more. Entries must be received by 5pm, Friday 6 January 2012.

ISTOCKPHOTO

Get back to stretching

US research comparing yoga, stretching and a self-care book on exercise and lifestyle modifications for the treatment of chronic lower-back pain has found yoga and stretching are equally effective at reducing symptoms and medication use. Subjects allocated to these treatment groups were more likely to rate their back pain as better, much better, or completely gone at all follow-up times than those in the self-care book group. The researchers caution that the study has several limitations, but suggest certain yoga and stretching techniques could be a useful and safe physical therapy for moderate lower-back pain. **KARINA BRAY**

Manufacturers leap to respond

In our latest round of fridge testing (page 54), two models, the Sharp SJ-339S-SL and the Westinghouse WTM2800WB failed to meet their energy claims, consuming substantially more juice than they're supposed to.

When we revealed our findings to the manufacturers, both were quick to respond. Sharp has tested three samples of the offending model, and sent an engineer from Japan to our labs to investigate. Electrolux, the makers of Westinghouse, tested a number of the same models off their production line. Both support our testing methods, but claim the fridge samples we have are faulty. We'll be testing another random sample of each model in an upcoming report to check those claims. **ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH**

Super scammers

The ATO is auditing promoters and users of early release super schemes.

You can only legally access your super before retirement in limited circumstances, such as if you're experiencing severe financial hardship. But promoters of illegal schemes may, for example, suggest you set up a fake self-managed super fund or use your super to pay off debts. These schemes are often scams, and promoters may take a high commission or even steal your super. Signing false statements can also lead to high tax penalties or even jail. If you're targeted, report it to the ATO on 131 020. **UTA MIHM**

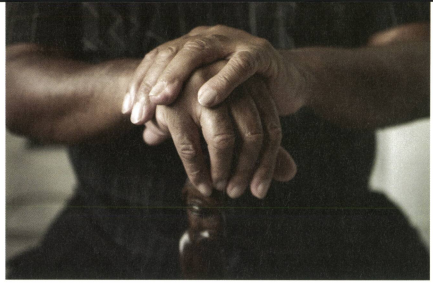
Restless hearts

A study of more than 52,000 Norwegians has found sleepless nights were associated with increased risk of heart attack.

The study, conducted by the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, found people who struggled to fall asleep almost every night were 45% more likely to have a heart attack. Those who had difficulty staying asleep almost every night were 30% more likely to have a heart attack. **ADAM GLYDE**

A good egg

Following our Checkout story on animal welfare labelling (*CHOICE*, October 2011), the free-range egg legislation introduced by the NSW Greens successfully passed the Upper House in late October. The bill passed with amendments by Labor and support from the Shooters and Fishers Party. The bill must still pass the Lower House to become law. **ANGELA MCDOUGALL**



Rhythm of my heart

A study conducted by researchers at the German Heart Centre in Munich has found hand-held airport metal detectors could be safe for people with pacemakers.

There have been reports that screening devices have caused older pacemakers to fail. But this limited study, involving 388 patients and two hand-held devices, found no change in pacemaker function after a 30-second scan. Clemens Jilek, lead researcher in the study, said the findings were encouraging but needed to be verified in a more thorough study.

Australian airports, including Brisbane and Sydney, generally recommend that passengers with pacemakers request separate screening to avoid potential issues.

ADAM GLYDE

Zero credibility

Retail sales staff may pressure consumers to buy consumer credit insurance (CCI), according to a recent ASIC review. They also may not explain CCI is optional, outline terms and conditions or reveal the costs of CCI.

CCI covers your debt and repayments in the event of your death, terminal illness, disablement or unemployment. It's generally available with a mortgage, personal loan or credit card and is optional.

CHOICE has exposed CCI as a rip-off, as other options give you far better and cheaper cover (see *CHOICE* March 2009 or choice.com.au/cci). On top of this, ASIC has found almost 16% of claims were denied – much higher than for other types of insurance.

UTA MIHM

Total recall

The ACCC has launched an iPhone app, Recalls Australia, that lists recalled goods and helps consumers know what to do if they've bought a product that has been recalled. Users can also dob in unsafe products. The app is available free from the iTunes store.

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH

Ka-ching!

The Commonwealth Bank has launched the Kaching mobile phone app, which allows users to make payments with their mobile phones by inputting a payee's phone number, email address or even Facebook account details.

Available for the iPhone in the coming months, the app also utilises the iCarte cover, which uses near-field communication technology to allow payment by tapping MasterCard PayPass-enabled terminals.

ELISE DALLEY

Dastardly duo

The federal government has asked the ACCC to investigate abuse of power by the big two supermarkets, as Woolworths announces plans to expand its home brand product range.

Manufacturers have alleged that shelf space is being auctioned off and the supermarkets have been using own-brand products to eliminate competition, according to Senator Kim Carr, Federal Minister for Industry. He says suppliers are stuck between a rock and a hard place when dealing with the big two. "If they don't deal with Coles or Woolworths they're out of business."

Tjeerd Jegen, Woolworths Managing Director of Australian Supermarkets, argues home brand products increase competition by offering the same quality at a lower price.

ADAM GLYDE

The gift of giving

An additional $3.5 million from the Australian government is being made available to developing countries in the Commonwealth to help reduce the cost of remittances, which currently cost an average of nine per cent of the amount sent. These remittances are an important source of income for people in countries such as Tonga and Samoa, where remittances equal more than 20% of GDP.

ELIZABETH McNESS

FIRST LOOK

IMAGE PHILIPS

Full steam ahead

Ironing is a chore, but with the new Philips PerfectCare you'll be steaming through the ironing in no time – you may even enjoy it.

There's no need for sorting the ironing by fabric type or fiddling with varying thermostat settings. You just fill the water station, switch it on and off you go. It doesn't have a temperature dial – it's automatically set to about 126°C, which is a little higher than the lowest setting on a conventional iron. The trick with this iron is that it's not the heat that does the work – it's the high volume of steam. The sole plate is just hot enough to dry off the fabric after steaming. It's this nifty design that allows you to iron silk, then linen, without changing settings.

We tested it rigorously by ironing organza, denim, silk, cotton, and wool; all creases were ironed out perfectly, fast and with ease. Linen took a little longer to iron, requiring use of the steam boost function (260g steam/min), but the result was very good.

It's also very easy to use. The water tank can be removed and refilled during ironing, the handle's very comfortable with enough room for larger hands, the iron glides effortlessly over all tested fabrics and there's a 1.9m long cord. Features include an auto shut-off when inactive for 10 minutes; water low, power on and descaling light indicators; cord storage; carry lock; and, of course, you can steam-iron clothes vertically.

One drawback is that due to the large volume of steam, the ironing board gets so wet that it occasionally drips a few drops of water through to the floor (after about 30 minutes of ironing). It's quite heavy to carry the whole unit (about 5kg) so it's best left set up permanently if possible.

CHOICE verdict

Overall this product scores 93% – ahead of most other conventional irons (see *CHOICE*, February 2011) – but it is expensive. **MARTHA PSIROUKIS**

PHILIPS STEAM STATION PERFECTCARE IRON GC9240

PRICE $599

CONTACT www.philips.com.au

★★★★½

Fact checking

A recent ACMA study found familiar media brands are expected by most consumers to meet community standards for taste and decency, regardless of whether the content is delivered via print, online or other media.

However, the study also found people do not expect all online content to be regulated. Keeping up with fast-changing technologies and security issues was also seen as a challenge. The regulator says the research will shed light on "the possible implications for regulation and provision of advice to consumers and citizens".

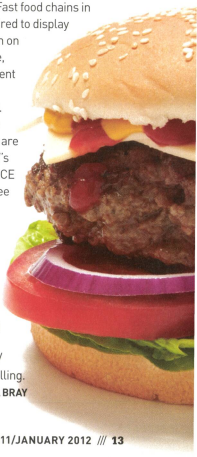
ANDY KOLLMORGEN

Kilojoules count

Hungry Jacks is the first fast food chain to display kilojoule counts on its menu boards, with Domino's close behind. Fast food chains in NSW are required to display the information on menus in store, with enforcement in place from February 2012.

Other states and territories are following NSW's lead, and CHOICE would like to see the initiative rolled out nationally. For more on food labelling, see our Better Food Labelling campaign at choice.com.au/betterfoodlabelling.

KARINA BRAY



Your Say

We want to hear from you. If your experience is not good, then you can help other CHOICE members avoid scams and rip-offs. If you've had a great response to a complaint you've taken to a manufacturer or retailer, our members want to know about that too! Email us at yoursay@choice.com.au or write to Your Say, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW 2204. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

Chemical concerns

I recently endured yet another sleepless night because Australian manufacturers will not catch up! Last night we ate Wokka shelf-fresh noodles for dinner. The next morning I had a close inspection of the label. It contains food colour 102 and 110, both of which have been banned in the UK. They have already done the research for us and know it causes hyperactivity (which is what kept me awake).

I would really like to see these food colours banned in Australia. It is very time consuming having to carefully read every label before you buy.

Cate Cameron, Hunters Hill, NSW

CHOICE SAYS *Health professionals have persistently voiced serious and ongoing concerns about food colour 110 (aka Sunset Yellow), but in fact it is not yet banned in the UK. However, it was the subject of a revised safety assessment by the European Food Safety Authority, which resulted in a reduced level of 110 permitted in drinks. Both 110 and 102 were included in the group of Southampton Six additives, which were recommended for phase-out in the UK following research from Southampton University released in 2007.*

Our submission to the recent review of food labelling has called for Food Standards Australia New Zealand to reconsider the use of these colours and establish a single, clear labelling system for all additives. We also want to see mandatory labelling extended to cover all additives. As it stands, an additive doesn't have to be listed if it's present in an ingredient (and doesn't perform a technological function in the final food) and makes up less than five per cent of the food product.

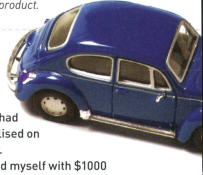
LETTER OF THE MONTH

Return of the dodgy rental car company

My daughter and I separately arranged cars online with a rental company to pick up at Tullamarine Airport. My daughter did not pick up her car because the company wanted to charge her twice the agreed internet price on arrival at the airport. I did not have this problem and picked up my car.

A number of issues ensued. First, I was required to use their e-toll tag and pay for three days of toll travel when I only used toll roads for two days. I collected the car from a dimly lit yard, with no attendant to check any pre-existing damage. And no-one was there to inspect for damage when I returned the car. I left the keys at the reception desk in good faith, knowing I had taken good care of the vehicle and caused no damage.

As we were boarding our flight, I received a message that I had caused a small scratch under the bumper bar. When I made contact after touching down I was told that a further scratch had materialised on the door.



I now find myself with $1000 taken from my account to repair the alleged scratches.

The moral of the story: in any car hire, go over the car with a fine-tooth comb – even underneath! And check very carefully in the contract what constitutes wear and tear.

Robyn Gibson, Sunshine Coast, Qld

Baiting the hook

I recently visited a Big W in Brisbane to buy a set of earbud headphones. A sign proclaimed: "Buy 3 for 2. From reg. price $8.84 each." Not wishing to own three sets of headphones, I opted to buy one. No price tag indicated that I wouldn't be paying the regular price of $8.84 for one.

The scan at the checkout counter read $9.94. When I showed staff the sign, they insisted the scanned price was correct. I then asked to be taken to the $8.84 headphones, but was told the store didn't stock them and that the sign was applicable to all Big W stores Australia-wide. They refused to admit the sign was misleading and correct it.

I wonder what other Australia-wide specials are advertised at low prices without stock available at the particular store you're shopping in.

Rachel Cobcroft, St Lucia, Qld

The offending 3-for-2 sign at Big W in Brisbane

CHOICE SAYS *Situations such as these may seem trivial in terms of financial damage, but they can add up to serious inconvenience for busy people. It's not the first we've heard of signs that take a liberal approach to accuracy. Here and in similar situations, consumers are trapped into paying more than they thought they were going to pay because the time and effort to go to another store is not worth the $1.10 saving.*

There's a parallel here with ATM fees, which target busy people who are likely to shell out the $2 rather than find a machine linked to their own bank. These small outlays add up.

In this case, you could bring this sign to the attention of the Queensland Office of Fair Trading. Under its definition of bait advertising, "A business cannot advertise goods at a certain price if it does not have a reasonable supply for consumers to buy, and instead urges consumers to buy higher-priced or lower-quality goods."

CHOICE SAYS *Rental car companies are near the top of the list of complaints received by CHOICE, and the kind of behaviour you describe appears to be an industry-wide problem. We contacted the company in question and were told a different story – that the e-toll tag policy was stated on the website, the lot was attended and lit, and a check-out report with any existing damage was issued before rental. They claim the damage was not there when the car left the lot and that they'll send along a refund if anything's left of the $1000 after the cost of repairs.*

We hope this issue is resolved fairly, but the bigger issue is the ongoing complaints about the industry as a whole, particularly regarding damage liability. Consumers Affairs Victoria (CAV) warned around holiday time last year that complaints were on the rise from travellers "who have hired vehicles believing they were covered for damage, only to receive a nasty shock when a large deduction was made from their credit card".

We certainly agree with CAV's position that "credit card deductions for damage ... should only be made after the hire company provides an itemised bill and a reasonable opportunity for you to dispute any charge".

Thumbs

A hinge broke on the lid of our two-month-old Fisher & Paykel freezer. I phoned the company and the next day a technician arrived and temporarily fixed the hinge, but decided the fault could be a safety concern. Someone from the company then rang me the next day to arrange for a new replacement freezer to be delivered the following week. The whole process from the day I placed the call took four working days. I doubt anyone could top that for service.

Deb Smith, Perth, WA

I bought degradable kitchen tidy bags from Glad to be environmentally aware. The first time I put them in the kitchen bin, the sides came apart. I had the same result with every bag I tried. You try to fill up the bag with rubbish but it always splits.

Kathryn Lucas, Shailer Park, Qld

We were very impressed by the quick and positive response of Cobram Estate to our complaint when the plastic nozzle on its 3L can of virgin olive oil broke off. They sent a replacement can in a short time and later a complimentary 375mL bottle of extra virgin olive oil. We say well done!

Pat & Brian Hillcoat, Carlton North, Vic

CHOICE washing machine expert Graham Byrne in action

Spokesperson Ingrid Just helps launch our food labelling campaign

Reel rip-off

Is it still possible to go to the movie a financial coronary? **Zoya Sheftalo**

ate night, girls' night ...

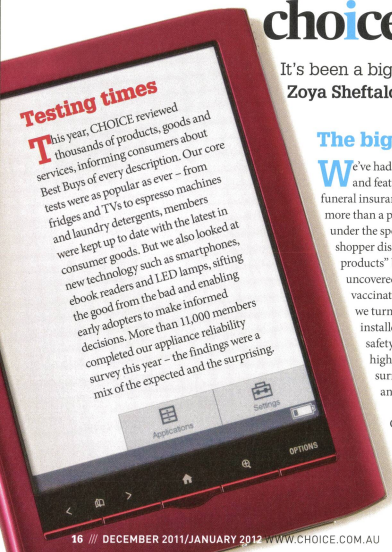
Miele's Iris Schaden celebrates winning B Washing Machine Br at the CHOICE Award

choice year in review

It's been a big year for the team here at CHOICE. **Zoya Sheftalovich** looks back at the highlights of 2011.

Testing times

This year, CHOICE reviewed thousands of products, goods and services, informing consumers about Best Buys of every description. Our core tests were as popular as ever – from fridges and TVs to espresso machines and laundry detergents, members were kept up to date with the latest in consumer goods. But we also looked at new technology such as smartphones, ebook readers and LED lamps, sifting the good from the bad and enabling early adopters to make informed decisions. More than 11,000 members completed our appliance reliability survey this year – the findings were a mix of the expected and the surprising.



The big issues

We've had a year of scoops in *CHOICE*'s news and features. In February we discovered that funeral insurance could end up costing you much more than a prepaid funeral. Pharmacies came under the spotlight in March, when our shadow shopper discovered plenty of dubious "health products" being spruiked. In May we uncovered the truth about which travel vaccinations you really need, and in June we turned up the heat on dodgy solar panel installers after uncovering a litany of safety issues. Then in October we highlighted the safety concerns surrounding unregulated use of laser and IPL hair removal and exposed the dirty dealings of the real estate press.

Books, movies, music, gadgets, postage and clothes – a series of CHOICE investigations during the year revealed Aussie shoppers pay more than those in the US, the UK or elsewhere for just about everything. From the latest smartphone apps to in-depth comparisons of online versus bricks-and-mortar retailers, we gave members resources to help ease the squeeze.

Making banking better

The year began with the CHOICE Better Banking Campaign in full swing, fighting to secure reforms for a more competitive and consumer-friendly banking sector. We successfully crusaded for the ban on mortgage exit fees, making it easier and far less expensive for consumers to shop around. We also pushed for easier account switching, and welcomed a new one-step switching process that means consumers will only have to deal with their new bank when moving accounts, from next July. Following a major CHOICE and NSW Fair Trading investigation, we welcomed the Reserve Bank of Australia's review of credit card surcharging.

In July we launched the CHOICE Big Bank Switch, a game-changing experiment in group switching and consumer empowerment. Within two weeks, more than 40,000 Australians had registered their interest in switching their mortgage, and by November more than 2000 mortgage holders were in discussions with lenders and stood to make significant savings on their home loan.

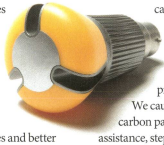
On the Menu

This has been a huge year for food labelling. In January, an important report into food labelling in Australia and New Zealand was released. Recommendations included wins for consumers in areas such as front-of-pack nutrition labelling, country-of-origin information and tightening rules around dodgy health claims – changes for which we've been campaigning for many years. To keep the momentum going and to ensure the opportunity to achieve major reforms isn't lost, CHOICE launched a major food-labelling campaign in September.

A further win for consumers was the introduction of kilojoule labelling of fast-food menus in NSW in February and moves by other state and territory governments to follow suit. On the advocacy front, we continue to be actively involved in developing the National Food Plan.

Keeping the spark alive

As cost-of-living issues dominated public debate in 2011, our campaigning turned towards the sharp rises in energy prices around Australia. We called for national reforms to the sector to create fairer prices and better products for households. As carbon pricing loomed, we said consumers shouldn't carry an undue burden, while calling for better energy efficiency and protections against price gouging.



We cautiously welcomed the carbon package, including household assistance, steps towards a national energy savings scheme and extra ACCC resources to monitor carbon con artists.

The gongs and the nongs

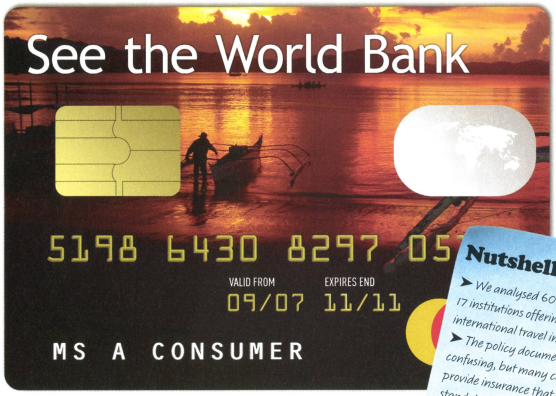
In April we unveiled the winners of our annual CHOICE Awards, which reward those who do the right thing by consumers. In one of our largest ever online polls, we surveyed more than 12,400 members for feedback on Australia's most popular bricks-and-mortar and online retailers – the favourites, Bunnings and eBay, receiving People's CHOICE Awards. The year's Consumer Champion Award went to Adam Brimo, a young campaigner who set up vodafail.com, which supplied details and information of network problems to Vodafone customers and the ACCC and ACMA, and recorded the struggles of those being let down by the carrier.

The year's worst of the worst were named and shamed in October's Shonky Awards – the one gong no-one wants to win. We shone a spotlight on the dodgy dealings around weight-loss product SensaSlim, and called out Quail Kingdom quail eggs on their quackery. We also took the insurance industry to task following the devastating Queensland floods, blasting confusing policies and slow processing. ■

This year's Shonkys garnered strong media interest

MAG MAKEOVER

Bucking the cost- and quality-cutting trend of some publications, *CHOICE* unveiled a new look this year. With extra pages and better-quality paper, not to mention a snazzy new logo, we're investing in making *CHOICE* better, brighter and more interesting for our members. It's already paying off, with *CHOICE* taking out a Maggie Magazine Cover Award for Best Cover of the Year for our June 2011 issue, featuring one of our biggest food stories of the year – "Fast food survival guide", an in-depth comparison of takeaway choices.



Nutshell

- We analysed 60 credit cards from 17 institutions offering complimentary international travel insurance.
- The policy documents are confusing, but many cards provide insurance that rivals standalone products.

Complimentary confusion

Gold and platinum credit cards often feature free travel insurance, but can you trust it? **Brendan Mays** deciphers the small print so you don't have to.

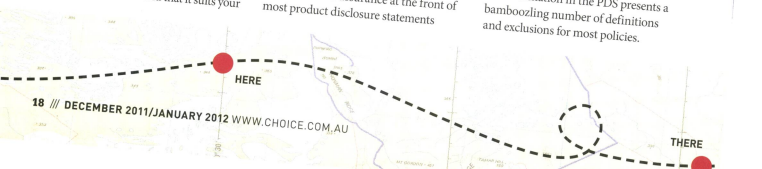
At the cost of high fees and soaring interest rates, some credit card providers offer "free" travel insurance. There's no denying this ready-to-go cover is handy when planning a holiday, but can you depend on it or is it a better idea to seek out a standalone policy?

Activation anguish

There are two key caveats with credit card travel insurance – you need to make sure the cover is activated and that it suits your needs. Just because it is a free product waiting to be used doesn't mean it will automatically suit your purposes.

Most cards require you to purchase your overseas airfare ticket on your credit card to be eligible for the insurance. Cover for your spouse and dependent children is also provided, but you must purchase their tickets on the card too and they usually need to travel with you the entire journey. This contradicts the assurance at the front of most product disclosure statements (PDS) that "benefits under the covers are automatically provided to cardholders".

Further into the document there is more information about "activating" the cover on your card. This trick has almost become common knowledge, but that doesn't help the unlucky ones who risk getting caught without cover. It's also a mammoth effort assessing whether the product will suit your needs, as the information in the PDS presents a bamboozling number of definitions and exclusions for most policies.



Free vs paid

Many of the cards we reviewed provide comparable quality protection to standalone travel insurance, especially if you want hassle-free cover for things such as cancellation, unlimited emergency medical and good protection for baggage and items. If you view the card travel insurance and standalone products side by side, the cover limits are similar.

One area in which credit card travel insurance falls down though is flexibility. For example, there are not as many options to customise your cover in terms of length of trip and reducing excess. However, free travel insurance is *not* based on location (unlike regular travel insurance), meaning you can travel from Europe to the US (for example) without having to worry whether your policy covers both areas.

Credit card travel insurance often doesn't have age limits, but you'll need to call your insurer and pay a fee for any pre-existing conditions. There are also the normal exclusions and weasel words, but these are common to both free and standalone travel insurance.

To avoid problems when making a claim, make sure you understand the limits of your cover – don't just rely on the headline promises in the PDS

Jargon jumble

Both credit card travel insurance and standalone products insure for accidental loss. However, given the number of restrictions and exclusions, the actual cover provided is limited to specific circumstances.

One of the biggest barriers is the exclusion of items that are left unattended or in a public place. We've heard numerous reports from CHOICE members who've had bags stolen at the airport, or even taken while being loaded into a taxi, only to have their claim denied because of this exclusion. Even if you file a police report (a requirement when making a claim), the clause still applies.

Insurers told CHOICE that cover is provided for things such as bags left inside taxis or for accidental breakages (dropping your camera, for example). To avoid problems when making a claim, make sure you understand the limits of your cover – don't just rely on the headline promises in the PDS.

HONOURABLE MENTIONS

A credit card's primary purpose isn't insurance – you should choose one primarily based on your purchasing needs. Typically, if you don't pay the full balance each month, you're likely to save more on interest with a low-rate card than you would by using extra features such as travel insurance and reward points.

Most premium credit cards (gold and platinum cards with extra features) also have hefty annual fees. If you do pay the balance in full each month, a low-fee credit card can save you more than the features provide, especially if you don't use them often.

However, if you use the benefits of premium cards often (such as high credit limits and additional features), then the cover provided becomes more important. Two premium cards in particular offer great value, as well as travel insurance cover to rival standalone products.

- The **Macquarie Platinum** and **Gold** cards outperformed all other contenders due to their comprehensive cover, a low excess and generous benefit limits. The annual fees begin at $100, which is good for this type of card. Just watch out for the high interest.
- The **St George Platinum** card has a low annual fee of $89 and a purchase rate of 15.99%, lower than most platinum cards at. It currently offers 3.99% balance transfers, and scored highly in our comparison.

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH: ADAM OLIVE & JANE BARGELL

Inclusions

- **Travel insurance for periods between two and 12 months**. In some cases, cover is provided for one-way tickets, but normally this is for a maximum of one month.
- **Excess is often once per event**, but not always.
- **All insurers reviewed had a 24-hour emergency helpline**. In medical emergencies, insurers require you to make arrangements using this number as soon as possible to qualify for cover.
- **Personal liability** is covered except with American Express Velocity Gold and Qantas Premium.
- **Natural disasters and severe weather** are covered.
- **Scuba diving with a licensed instructor** is typically covered, as is motorcycle riding, but only if you're licenced and the bike is under 200cc.
- **Funeral expenses and accidental death payouts** are a feature of most cards (Amex does not cover accidental death).
- **Unforseen complications arising due to pregnancy** are covered, but usually restricted to a certain period. A baby born unexpectedly on a journey may not be covered.
- **Insurers may pay for you to return home in the event of a disaster or in case a relative is ill or dies**. Costs to resume your journey may be conditionally covered.
- **Some cards provide benefits in case you need to get to a special event, or for things such as being hijacked or mugged**. Domestic inconvenience cover is also a frequent feature, which is basically a limited version of domestic travel insurance.
- **Most cards provide cover for a hire car excess** should it be damaged.
- **Some cards provide cover for travel provider insolvency** and for claims that are the fault of carriers.

Exclusions & restrictions

- **Acts of terrorism and war** are not covered under any circumstance except if you are injured in a terrorist attack, in which case evacuation and medical cover is normally provided.
- **Aerial activities such as bungee jumping and skydiving** are excluded in most cases. So are professional sports, extreme sports, any form of racing (except on foot) and your "conscious exposure to danger".
- **Separate limits apply to items such as laptops, cameras and mobile phones.** Checked luggage is often not covered, so carry your valuables with you at all times to avoid trouble.
- **Business items** are typically not covered, or only to a low limit.
- **Items left in an unlocked vehicle, in a vehicle overnight or in plain sight** are not covered. Anything stolen from a vehicle is typically restricted under sub-limits.
- **Items left "unattended" in a public place** are not covered. We know from previous member feedback that putting down your bag even for a moment can void your cover.
- **You must have your accommodation and airfares booked** before making a claim.
- **No cover for travelling against medical advice**, STDs or HIV-related illnesses.
- **No benefits for relatives who aren't Australian citizens** (returning home, for example).
- **Supplementary cardholders** (except your spouse) are typically not covered.
- **Using an unlicensed travel agent** will void your cover.
- **You must report all incidents to authorities** to qualify for cover.
- **You should not admit any liability** in order to qualify for cover.
- **No cover for cancellations due to lack of numbers** (for example, on a tour).

	Annual fee ($)	Overall score (%)	Excess* ($)
Macquarie Platinum	200	91	1
Macquarie Gold	100	90	1
CBA Diamond & Platinum	(A)	89	2
St George^ Platinum	89	89	2
Bank of Queensland Platinum	199	88	2
Suncorp Platinum	199	88	2
Virgin High Flyer	249	87	2
Citibank Platinum cards	(B)	86	2
Westpac Platinum cards	(C)	86	2
Bankwest Platinum cards	(D)	84	2
Westpac Gold cards	(E)	83	2
CBA Gold cards	(F)	82	2
HSBC Premier Rewards	(G)	81	2
Amex Platinum Charge	900	80	0
HSBC Platinum	(H)	80	2
NAB Gold and Platinum	(J)	80	2
Bank of Queensland Gold	120	79	2
IMB Rewards	90	79	2
CUA Rewards	90	78	2
St George^ Gold Low Rate	79	78	2
Suncorp Gold	120	78	2
Citibank Gold	149	77	2
ANZ Platinum cards	(K)	76	2
Bankwest Gold cards	(L)	76	2
Amex Platinum Reserve	395	68	1
Amex Qantas Ultimate	450	62	
Amex Platinum Edge	149	61	
Amex Velocity Platinum	349	61	
Amex Gold Charge	130	59	5
Amex Qantas Premium	249	56	
Amex Velocity Gold	199	56	

TABLE NOTES * Some claims excluded from excess. ** Cover may be available through transport accident insurance. ^ Also includes Bank of Melbourne and Bank SA cards of the same name. **na** Not applicable. **(A)** Diamond $425; Platinum $280. **(B)** Select $700, Signature $395, Emirates Platinum $229, Platinum $199, Clear Platinum $99. **(C)** Platinum Earth Platinum $250, Singapore Platinum $250, Altitude Platinum $295.

MEDICAL			CANCELLATIONS			BAGGAGE			ADDITIONAL COVER		
Unlimited emergency medical cover	Hospital cash allowance ($, per day/policy limit)	Emergency dental limit ($)	Unlimited cancellations cover	Cover for epidemics / pandemics	Short delay benefit ($, per person/ total, after four or six hours)	Overall limit for baggage and items ($, per person / policy limit)	Single item limit for valuables ($)	Cover limit for cash and documents ($, per person / policy limit)	Accidental death payout**	Loss of income cover	Domestic travel inconvenience
✓	150/15,000	1250	✓	✓	700/1200	15,000/20,000	3500	550/1250	✓		✓
✓	75/10,000	1250	✓	✓	500/900	15,000/20,000	3000	500/1000	✓		
✓	100/10000	1500	✓		250/800	15,000/30,000	5000	500/1000	✓	✓	✓
✓	100/12,000	1250	✓	✓	475/1100	15,000/20,000	5000	500/1000	✓	✓	✓
✓	110/16,000	1250	✓		475/1100	16,000/32,000	5000	600/1100	✓	✓	
✓	100/16,500	1250	✓		475/1100	16,000/32,000	5000	6001200	✓	✓	
✓	110/16,000	1250	✓		Costs	16,000/32,000	5000	600/1100	✓	✓	
✓	110/16,500	1250	✓		Costs	16,000/32,000	5000	600/1100	✓	✓	✓
✓	100/12,000	1250	✓		500/1000	20,000/30,000	3500	550/1250	✓		✓
✓	50/1500	1250	✓		475/1100	20,000/30,000	5500	600/1100	✓		✓
✓	100/12,000	1250	✓		500/900	15,000/20,000	3000	500/1000	✓		
✓	75/7500	1500	✓		250/800	10,000/20,000	3000	500/1000	✓	✓	
✓	75/2250	750	✓		350/900	25,000/40,000	6000	600/1100	✓		
✓	75/5000	1500		✓	700/No additional limit	30,000	5000	1000		✓	✓
✓	50/1500	750	✓		500/900	20,000/32,000	5500	600/1100	✓		
✓	100/15,000	No sub limit	✓	✓	250/500 (Ω)	15,000/20,000	2000	na	✓	✓	✓
✓	110/7500	1000	✓		275/700	11,000/16,000	3000	300/550	✓	✓	
✓	110/7500	1250	✓		275/700	11,000/16,000	3000	300/550	✓	✓	
✓	110/7500	1000	✓		275/700	11,000/16,000	3000	300/550	✓	✓	
✓	25/750	1250	✓	✓	375/900	10,000/15,000	3500	300/600	✓	✓	
✓	100/7500	1000	✓		275/700	11,000/16,000	3000	300/550	✓	✓	
✓	110/7500	1250	✓		Costs	15,000/20,000	3000	500/1000	✓	✓	
✓	75/15,000	2000	✓	✓	500/1000	12,000/24,000	1000	na	✓	✓	✓
✓	25/750	1250	✓		375/900	10,000/15,000	3750	300/600	✓		✓
$2.5m	150/1500	1000		✓		10,000	1000	500			✓
$2.5m	150/1500	1000		✓		10,000	1000	500			✓
$2.5m	150/1500	1000		✓		10,000	1000	500			✓
$2.5m	150/1500	1000		✓	700/No additional limit	10,000	1000	500			✓
$2.5m	150/1500	1000		✓		10,000	1000	500			✓
$2.5m	150/1500	1000		✓		5000	1000	500			✓
$2.5m	150/1500	1000		✓		5000	1000	500			✓

Platinum Breeze $130, Platinum More $189, Platinum Zero $0. **(E)** Gold $90, Earth Gold $125, Singapore Gold $125, Altitude Gold $150. Gold Awards $144, Gold Low Fee $90, Gold Low Rate $120. **(G)** Qantas Rewards $99, Rewards Plus $0. **(H)** Qantas Platinum $199, Platinum 3. **(J)** Qantas Platinum $290, Qantas Gold $145.50, Velocity Gold $150, Gold Card $90, Gold Visa Debit $10 a month. **(K)** Platinum $87 (Free year), Rewards Platinum $149, FF Platinum $295. **(L)** Gold Breeze $99, Gold More $120, Gold Zero $0. **(M)** $250 medical (150 other claims), $500 medical, $250 for laptops and cancellations, $100 baggage. **(P)** 62 days consecutive/120 per year. **(Ω)** If delay continues for an tional 18 hours, an additional $500 for singles and an additional $1000 for families maximum.

CHOICE verdict

Our analysis of credit cards offering complimentary travel insurance left us pleasantly surprised. The cover offered will suit the requirements of many leisure travellers, and it is comparable to standalone policies. There are some issues with flexibility, and as with any product, not all are created equal.

The biggest downside is the complicated PDS documents, and unlike purchasing travel insurance through a standalone provider, there are not as many guides or tables to compare cover at a glance. If you can spare the time to read through the PDS and have a suitable credit card, this free feature can put travel protection on your itinerary. ■

HOW WE SCORE

The table does not show all elements that contribute to our scoring. We analyse each PDS and survey insurers for additional information (Amex did not return our surveys in time for publication). Scoring is weighted as follows:

- Medical, 40%
- Cancellations, 25%
- Baggage, 20%
- Liability, 10%
- Other services, 5%

Refer to your policy document for all terms, conditions and exclusions and consider your individual situation when assessing a new product.

Holiday temptations

Uta Mihm uncovers how interest-free deals can slug you with hefty fees.

As shopping traps go, long-term payment deals are as bad as they get. They can cost you hundreds of dollars in fees alone, even if you pay everything off within the interest-free period.

CHOICE recently looked at some interest-free payment offers available with major retailers, and calculated that the fees you'd pay for them range from 22.3% up to 87.6% of the minimum purchase price. So, for example, a $549.95 Braun shaver could cost you close to $700 with a David Jones three-year, interest-free offer if you pay for it using the retailer's own StoreCard – and almost $1000 if you use the Amex David Jones card. We also found a no-deposit, four-years-to-pay offer that charges not only $220 in fees but also 26% interest from day one.

About 1.3 million Australian consumers used GE Capital interest-free offers over the past five years. While most paid off their purchase within the interest-free period, almost one in three paid interest. Depending on the product they used, the rates ranged up to almost 30%.

How they work

Long-term payment offers usually come in four different types:

- **Buy now, pay later** You take your purchase home and don't need to make any repayments or pay interest during the interest-free period. If you fail to repay it (along with all the fees) within the interest-free period, interest will usually apply on the remaining balance from the end of that period onwards.
- **Interest free, instalments payable** You pay off the purchase in equal instalments

over the interest-free period. If you miss an instalment, interest will apply not only to that instalment but also to the remaining balance of your account.

- **Interest free, with minimum payment required** You pay a minimum repayment over the interest-free period and must pay the remaining amount before the interest-free period expires. If you miss minimum repayments, penalty fees will apply.
- **No deposit, four years to pay** You pay off the purchase over four years, interest applies from day one and there is no interest-free period.

87.6%

The amount fees can add to your interest-free purchase

$988.15

The total cost for a $549.95 shaver purchased at David Jones using a three-year interest-free offer with the Amex David Jones credit card

Conditions often apply to these offers, such as upfront deposits and minimum purchase amounts.

The bait

You usually have to apply for a credit or store card to obtain interest-free offers, which can come with a hefty annual fee and high rate of interest. The GO MasterCard charges 29.49% interest on purchases not paid off within the interest-free period, while the Amex David Jones card has a $99 annual fee.

The credit card companies aren't obliged to remind you when the interest-free period ends, so it's important to check your statement carefully, especially if you use an interest-free offer that has a minimum payment. This payment normally won't cover the purchase price within the interest-free period, so you'll need to make extra repayments or pay a lump sum at the end to avoid the interest slug.

The smaller your purchase, the greater the impact fees have on the value of the offer. With the GEM Visa Card you pay a flat annual fee of $99, and a six-month interest-free period applies with any purchase over $250. But you can use it for as many interest-free purchases as you like without paying any additional fees. Depending on the offers available at different retailers, you can use it for more expensive purchases and longer interest-free periods as well. You could, for example, use it for a five-year interest-free offer at a furniture retailer to buy a $3000 lounge suite and automatically get six months interest-free on a $260 anniversary dinner in a two-hat restaurant.

With other cards, such as the David Jones StoreCard, you have to pay a new application fee and additional monthly fee with every interest-free offer.

INTEREST FREE OR INTEREST PAID?

	Term (months)	Interest rate	Total fees/ interest ($)	Total price ($)*
140cm TV $3238				
Interest-free deal	48	0%	263	3501
Low-interest credit card	48	10.99%	763	4001
Higher-interest credit card	48	19.59%	1408	4656
81cm TV $798				
Low-interest credit card	48	10.99%	191	989
Interest-free deal	48	0%	263	1061
Higher-interest credit card	48	19.59%	356	1154

USING THE TABLE Low-interest card is the Bankwest Breeze MasterCard. Higher-interest card is the Westpac 55-day MasterCard. We assume either is already your everyday card, so haven't included the annual fee in our calculations. We also assume you're paying for your purchase in equal instalments. We used fees charged by GO MasterCard for the interest-free deal. *Rounded to nearest dollar.

A better option?

There is one circumstance in which an interest-free offer may make sense, and that's when your only other option is to pay off the item over time using your credit card. Our comparison (left) shows that even when you use a credit card with a low interest rate of 10.99%, it can be cheaper to use an interest-free offer for an expensive item. If you're able to pay off the amount over a shorter period or are buying a lower-cost item, using a low-interest credit card can be the better option. But the interest-free deal is usually a better deal than a high-interest credit card.

THE DEVIL'S IN THE DETAIL

A CHOICE shadow shop of major retailers offering interest-free deals in early November revealed a lack of proper disclosure. Salespeople in five of the six stores gave incomplete or wrong information about details such as interest rates, fees and conditions. It turns out retailers are exempt from some important licensing requirements imposed on the credit providers whose products they represent. CHOICE thinks this loophole can cause consumers to be misinformed about the credit deals they are signing up for and we would support an official review of the exemption. For the full story, see choice.com.au/interestfreeshadowshop.

THE REAL COSTS

		Purchase price ($)	Application fee ($)	Ongoing monthly fee ($)	Annual fee ($)	Term (months)	Interest rate (%)*	Total fees ($)**	Total price ($)**	Percentage of purchase price (%)
Bridgestone Tyres	GEM Visa Card	**250**	0	0	99	6	22.99	**99**	349	**39.60**
David Jones	David Jones Amex (A)	**500**	35	2.95	99	36	20.74	**438**	938	**87.64**
David Jones	David Jones StoreCard	**500**	35	2.95	0	36	24.74	**141**	641	**28.20**
Harvey Norman	GO MasterCard	**1000**	25	4.95	0	40	29.49	**223**	1223	**22.30**
Bing Lee	HSBC Visa Card	**1200**	0	0	59	50	25.99	**99**	349	**39.60**

TABLE NOTES (A) 15,000 Membership Rewards Points are available after the initial three purchases outside David Jones on the card within the first month, which would buy you a $100 gift card for a range of major retailers under the American Express rewards program. * Applies only after the interest-free period. ** How we calculate: We looked at offers available with major retailers on 28 October 2011. We assumed you purchase an item for the minimum purchase price, pay it off within the interest-free period and don't incur any penalty fees. The cost would be the same, regardless of the price of the item. If you made a more expensive purchase, the percentage of purchase price figures would be smaller. All amounts rounded to the nearest dollar.

SILLY SEASON SHOPPING TRAPS

Extended warranties The salesperson tells you that, for an extra couple of hundred dollars, an extended warranty on your purchase will give you another four years' protection should anything go wrong. But you're buying insurance you most likely won't need: most appliances are covered by a manufacturer's warranty, usually one year for TVs and up to three years for some LCD and plasma models. And, if something goes wrong outside the warranty period, you may be covered under the Australian Consumer Law, which provides statutory consumer guarantees for any kind of goods or services regardless of any manufacturer or extended warranty.

Christmas Club savings accounts Usually offered by credit unions, they're designed to help you to avoid credit card bill shock after Christmas by preventing you from accessing any funds you've saved in them until just before Christmas. But some have dismal interest rates, such as just one per cent. You'll be better off with an online savings account that adds a much higher rate of interest to your savings.

Gift cards and vouchers have been the subject of numerous complaints to CHOICE over the years. More than half of the participants in a 2010 CHOICE survey told us they'd been ensnared by the most common trap – the gift card expired before they were able to use its full value. Almost all gift cards sold in Australia expire after one year or less; only a handful of cards, such as Bunnings and Toys"R"Us, have an indefinite expiry.

Online shopping scams Scammers can pretend to be selling a product via a website or auction site – often very cheaply – just so they can steal your credit card or bank account details. Similarly, they may take your money but send you a faulty or worthless product instead – or even nothing at all.

No refunds given Retailers sometimes display signs saying "no refunds given". This is illegal. If what you've bought is faulty or defective, you're legally entitled to a refund. However, you're not legally entitled to a refund if you simply change your mind. ■

Nutshell

- Satisfaction with day-to-day banking mostly comes down to customer service.
- The big four fall well short of the mark, but switching is seen as a tall order.

They love you not

Most people are sticking with the big four banks but see plenty of room for improvement. **Andy Kollmorgen** outlines the results of our latest satisfaction survey.

Australia's big four banks can claim most people who took part in our 2011 banking satisfaction survey as long-term customers, but calling them satisfied would be a stretch.

We've considered a wide range of responses from 2546 survey participants, a striking 36% of whom bank with Commonwealth Bank (CBA), the most popular in our survey. More than three-quarters of them have been with CBA for longer than 10 years, and 41% of respondents have been distributed more or less evenly among at least one of the other three most popular banks – ANZ, Westpac and NAB – for 10 or more years. It's a big piece of the pie, no matter how you slice it. The big four dominate across transaction accounts, credit cards and home loans, with only ING Direct breaking into the top four for savings accounts (the big four banks make up the rest of the top five).

This customer loyalty is astonishing given significantly fewer survey participants gave their big four bank an overall rating of very good or excellent – our criteria for satisfaction – compared with customers of other institutions. The big four were bottom-dwellers in our 2010 survey, too.

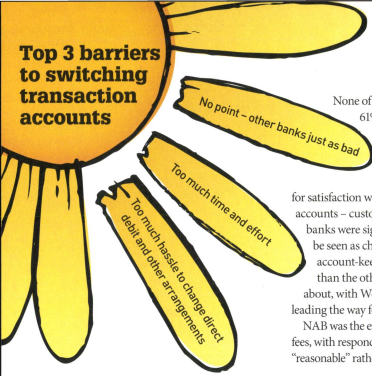
This year, the clear leaders for customer satisfaction overall were, in descending order:

- Teachers Credit Union (TCU)
- UBank (an online-only division of NAB, so not one of the big four for the purposes of this survey)
- bankmecu
- Members Equity (ME) Bank
- Rabobank
- CUA
- ING Direct
- Bendigo Bank

Customers of these institutions were also generally more likely to recommend their bank to friends, family and colleagues. TCU, ING Direct, Bendigo and ME Bank were also near the top of the satisfaction scale last year, while the others are newcomers.

WORST THREE FOR EXCESSIVE TRANSACTION ACCOUNT FEES

Westpac ANZ CommonwealthBank


Top 3 barriers to switching transaction accounts
No point – other banks just as bad
Too much time and effort
Too much hassle to change direct debit and other arrangements

None of the big four scored above 61%, and all ranked near the bottom for the criterion our members consider the most important for satisfaction with their transaction accounts – customer service. The big four banks were significantly more likely to be seen as charging high or excessive account-keeping and penalty fees than the other institutions we asked about, with Westpac, ANZ and CBA leading the way for excessive penalty fees.

NAB was the exception on penalty fees, with respondents rating them as "reasonable" rather than high or excessive (although almost twice as many said Bendigo's penalty fees were reasonable).

For most survey participants, the relationship with Australia's biggest banks has been a rocky one. But it's a relationship that about nine out of 10 who have an account with one of the big four say they're likely to continue, even as their loyalty is constantly put to the test. For some, however, loyalty has its limits. Those who've left their bank and other institutions have mainly done so due to high fees and because they felt their loyalty was not being rewarded.

So why aren't more customers who have stuck with the majors looking for a little more appreciation?

The switching story

Our *Better Banking* report, released in March 2011, spelled out the main reasons customers don't take their business elsewhere regardless of whether they're satisfied. These reasons still hold sway for transaction account holders who took our survey. The number one rationale for survey participants staying put is that there's "no point" in going to another bank, since it's unlikely to offer anything better. But some banks charge more fees than others, and some offer better interest rates. The survey results underscore this point, as do our CHOICE Awards reviews (see *CHOICE*, April 2011) of low-fee transaction and high-interest online savings accounts. A surprising number of survey respondents (23%) said they were unaware of how their transaction account penalty fees compare with those of other institutions – all the more reason to take a closer look and make sure you're getting a square deal.

As we reported last year, the RBA issued a major correction after reporting that deposit account penalty fees had dropped from $516 million in 2008 to $476 million in 2009. Fees actually dropped from $701 million to $688 million over that period. In 2010 deposit account penalty fees dropped $293 million, and the RBA has reported that all types of household banking fees had significantly declined as of mid-year.

BOTTOM OF THE CLASS FOR OVERALL SATISFACTION
ANZ, CBA, Westpac, HSBC, Citibank Australia

BEST CUSTOMER SERVICE FOR TRANSACTION ACCOUNTS (BANKS)
TCU, Bendigo Bank, bankmecu

ING Direct had the highest satisfaction score for transaction accounts – a very impressive 97%

Only with home loans do CHOICE members appear more willing than the general population to trust smaller providers, with just 56% of survey respondents doing business with one of the big four compared with about 80% in the broader market.

Top for overall satisfaction

1 TCU
2 UBank (NAB)
3 bankmecu
4 ME Bank
5 Rabobank
6 CUA
7 ING Direct
8 Bendigo Bank

Transaction satisfaction

The big four fared about the same as they did for overall satisfaction when respondents rated their customer service and weighed in on penalty and account-keeping fees for transaction accounts, the product area we looked at most closely. ING Direct, ME Bank and CUA were standout customer favourites when it came to account-keeping fees, while bankmecu and Bendigo took top honours for customer service. ING Direct had the highest satisfaction score for transaction accounts, with a very impressive 97%, closely followed by TCU with 96%.

We can also report that what many perceive as the other two main barriers to switching – too much time and effort and the hassle of changing automatic debit or credit arrangements – are far from insurmountable, according to many survey respondents who've made the switch. While one member who switched from ANZ to Bendigo reported that "ANZ does not make closing accounts easy" and others said the process was tedious, time-consuming and/or inconvenient, about half of respondents weighing in on the switching question said it was easy, very easy, "super" easy or "extremely" easy.

Going fee-free appears to have paid off in spades for NAB, our 2011 CHOICE Award winner for Best Low-fee Bank Account. NAB began the fee-free revolution in 2009, yet recently posted its biggest profit – $5.5 billion for the 12 months to September this year. CEO Cameron Clyne has said the windfall can largely be attributed to the bank's increased consumer focus in personal banking, but this seems to be spin given NAB came dead last in this survey for customer service related to transaction accounts.

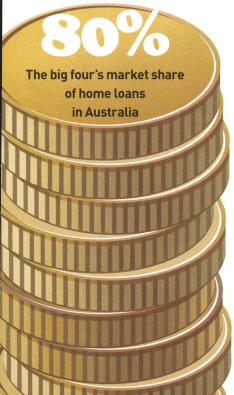
Switching is still not at as easy as it should be. Our call for portable account numbers has yet to become a reality, and industry stakeholders have thrown up smokescreens, such as contending that an overhaul of the electronic infrastructure is beyond the industry's financial reach. However, there have been some promising developments. From July next year, banks will have to take new steps to facilitate switching under the government's "tick and flick" initiative. CHOICE is working with government to iron out the details, including a single switching form provided by customers that banks will use to re-route direct debits and credits, withdrawals and other pre-existing arrangements.

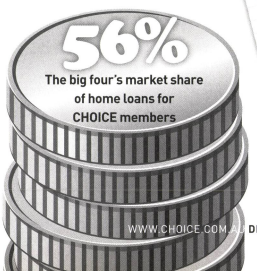
Consumers also came away with a big win from the government's inquiry into competition in the banking sector – a ban on exit fees for home loans established after July this year. This may explain why just over half of our survey respondents with a mortgage have theirs with the big four compared with 80% of the general population.

Credit rating

About one in five CHOICE members who participated in the survey bank with credit unions – mainly CUA. Relationships with credit unions among members have been as long-term as those with the big four, with more than three-quarters sticking it out for 10 years or longer.

The sector as a whole, including building societies, got significantly higher overall satisfaction ratings than the banks, with TCU doing particularly well (scoring high marks in our key transaction account categories of customer service, availability of ATMs, internet and phone banking facilities, security of money and fees, only falling short for availability of branches). Only 62% of respondents gave an overall rating of very good or excellent for banks, compared with 89% for non-banks. ■





Six points of satisfaction

Satisfaction with customer service is the most important contributor to overall satisfaction with everyday transaction accounts. Here's what CHOICE survey respondents told us is important.

1. Customer service
2. Internet banking facilities
3. Account-keeping fees
4. Security of money
5. Availability of ATMs
6. Penalty fees

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PAYMENT DETAILS (Please select ONE of the following methods)

☐ **I wish to pay by credit card**

☐ Amex ☐ Mastercard ☐ Visa ✓ (Please tick)

Card number: | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Name on card:.....

Cardholder's signature:.....

Expiry date: ☐☐/☐☐

☐ **Cheque / Money Order** (Payable to CHOICE)

MAIL THIS FORM TO

CHOICE Customer Service, Reply Paid 63261, Marrickville NSW 2204

MEMBERSHIP PHONE

1800 069 552 9am – 5pm Mon to Fri (AEST)

MEMBERSHIP FAX

02 9577 3355

☐ **Use CHOICE standard gift card message**

☐ **Use a personalised gift card message:**.....

.....

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The best intentions...

New Year resolutions often involve health, fitness or saving money. **Kate Browne** discovers how to meet your goals while avoiding the traps.

It's 2 January, the silly season is over, and it's that time of the year when we resolve to do things differently. It could be a commitment to exercise more, give up smoking or make some simple lifestyle changes to save money and to live more sustainably.

We take a look at some common traps to watch out for and offer some advice to ensure your resolution won't be broken by March.

Save your wallet and the planet

For many of us, ringing in the New Year means an opportunity to put the household budget in order. And one of the biggest issues this year is rising energy bills. According to the ACCC, electricity prices have gone up on average by 70% across states (including inflation) since 2007, so there's never been a better time to look into simple changes to keep costs down, as well as being a bit greener.

Doing so can mean simple measures such as turning off appliances at the plug. Other actions such as choosing a high-efficiency TV, washing machine, dishwasher and fridge could save a household more than $4000 in combined energy and water running costs over 10 years compared with low-efficiency appliances. While they may seem small, these sorts of changes also contribute to the greater good. It's been estimated that if all Australian households cut their energy use by just 10% there would be a saving of almost $2bn a year – not so small after all.

Trap: shameful plugs

The CHOICE Shonky Awards gave a lemon trophy to one device on the market that claims it will save you energy with its plug-in device.

Priced at $299, the Go4Green EnergySmart claims it'll save you 10% on power bills and should pay for itself in six months. Sounds good, except that it doesn't work. To top it off, the ACCC recently recalled the device due to the risk of electric shock. We've been advised of similarly dodgy products being touted by door-to-door salespeople to households anxious about energy costs. Our experts' advice on these devices? "None that we've seen so far work."

For more tips and tricks, head to **choice.com.au/tenpercentchallenge**

DID YOU KNOW?

- Australian households spend close to $1bn a year on standby power. This could be slashed simply by turning many appliances off at the plug.
- Changing the thermostat on your air conditioner or heater by just one degree can increase heating bills by 10%.
- Failure to replace old incandescent globes with energy-saving CFLs results in people using 80% more electricity than they need to power a light.
- If you don't use a water-saving showerhead, you could be using up to an extra 48L of hot water per shower. That's up to $100 extra per year.
- Washing clothes in hot water costs money as a hot water cycle uses up to 90% more energy than a cold water wash.

Time to quit – no butts about it

It's almost impossible to smoke anywhere in public these days, but surprisingly, at last count, almost 17% of Australians still smoke regularly.

First, the facts. Smoking-related diseases killed 14,900 Australians in the 2004-05 financial year, which equates to 40 preventable deaths every day. The major tobacco-related diseases include cancer, heart disease and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Smoking resulted in more than 750,000 days spent in hospital and added up to $670 million in hospital costs in that financial year.

It's no secret that smoking is bad for you, but it is also one of the hardest habits to kick. Caroline Miller, chair of Tobacco Issues at the Cancer Council, says the secret to quitting requires commitment and usually an "a ha" moment. "Smoking is a complex behavioural, emotional and addictive behaviour and no one size fits all." She goes on to say that most people eventually quit by going cold turkey, but many of them have several attempts before they are successful.

Trap: don't pay to quit

Despite cold turkey being the most successful strategy for giving up, there is no shortage of products and services happy to take your money, promising a magic bullet. These range from electric cigarettes to programs that promise you will quit forever in just seven days – all for the right price, of course.

"People should be wary of any method or intervention or program that claims to have a 100% success rate," says Miller. "Quitting is hard – so hard that only a small percentage of quit attempts last for 12 months or longer."

Click here for help

While there are plenty of anti-smoking apps available for iPhone and Android, a recent review in the US of the apps currently on the market found none meet the acceptable standards proven to help people kick the habit. However, there are a range of good online support programs around, such as QuitCoach. For more information, visit quitcoach.org.au.

Tips to quit

- Nicotine replacement therapy and prescription medications such as Champix (which reduces the effects of nicotine in the body) can help with the addictive aspect of nicotine.
- Cutting down, with or without pharmacotherapy, will increase the likelihood of quitting because it reduces nicotine dependence.
- Getting counselling through the Quitline 13 7848 helps to work through behavioural changes and to get advice on quitting tips and methods.
- Some people also find hypnotherapy works for them (even though this is not supported by randomised controlled trials).
- There is no magic solution when it comes to giving up – it all depends on what works best for you – but there are plenty of options.

Use it or lose it? Gym contract traps

As soon as the holiday period is over, streets, gyms and swimming pools across the land are full of well-intentioned folks trying to get fit and shed a few kilos. But by Easter, many of these born-again exercisers have swapped the gym or the park for the couch and some chocolate.

A recent Australian report by IBISWorld shows that "going to the gym" is now listed as the second-most popular fitness activity after walking, and it's projected that in the current financial year Australians will spend $2.9bn on the fitness industry. At the same time, however, we continue to rate as one of the most obese nations on the planet. So it seems that while many of us will join the gym and pay for memberships, we aren't necessarily going.

Australians will spend $2.9bn on the fitness industry, yet at the same time we continue to rate as one of the most obese nations on the planet

And new chains continue to pop up like mushrooms offering

something for everyone. There are glitzy chain gyms such as Fitness First and Virgin Active, women-only gyms such as Fernwood – and the latest fad, the 30-minute workout gyms such as Fit n Fast. Many gyms require members to commit to costly memberships, and a past CHOICE investigation found many use aggressive sales techniques to sign you up and even more aggressive techniques to try and keep you on, should you decide you don't want to go anymore.

Before you rush to sign up at a gym, why not stop and consider the alternatives? Swimming is cheap and offers a great low-impact workout, running can work for some, and then there's the cheapest and easiest exercise of all – walking. For more ideas, head to **choice.com.au/homegym** for information on some common exercise myths and tips, and a guide on how to set up your own home gym for less than $100.

Trap: check the fine print

If you have your heart set on the gym, be wary of special offers, promotions and verbal promises. Never take the salesperson's word when it comes to offers and always take the gym contract home and read all the terms and conditions before you sign up. When we conducted a shadow shop of gym sales tactics, we found some gyms refuse to hand over the contract they expect the member to sign. This contravenes the Fitness Industry Code of Practice set out by the industry body Fitness Australia and should ring alarm bells for any consumer. If you do have the contract, watch out that the fees listed on the contract are the same as the price that has been quoted to you, in particular check the administration fees for setting up or renewing your membership. These can be non-refundable even if you cancel the contract during the cooling-off period. Cancellations can also cost, with many gyms charging up to $300. ■

There's an app for that

Couch to 5k

Available for iPhone, iPod and Android, this handy little app will help get you into shape using a simple three-day-a-week workout program spanning nine weeks. It will guide you through an interval training session step by step, while playing music of your choice.

The lowdown on joining up

If you're still keen on joining the gym brigade, here are some tips:

- **Consider your needs** Is the gym convenient to get to? What will happen if you move or change jobs? Does it provide childcare if you need it? Does it have enough machines, lockers and space? Visit the gym on several occasions, at the times you plan to visit.
- **Check if the gym is a member of Fitness Australia** at fitness.org.au or call 1300 211 311. Members must comply with the Fitness Industry Code of Practice, which includes providing a copy of the contract to members and a cooling-off period upon joining.
- **Don't be pressured into signing up on the spot** Consider a casual membership for a month or a few visits to see if the gym is right for you. Be wary of any special offers or promotions.
- **Beware direct debit payment schemes** Many gyms ask for payments by direct debit, but even when your membership expires it doesn't mean the direct debits will stop. Check the contract before you sign. If the fitness centre continues taking payments, talk to your financial institution as soon as possible.
- **If you need to cancel your membership, check your contract to see what is required** Even if the contract requires you to visit the centre to cancel in person, it is also wise to do it in writing – that way you can prove the date you requested the membership end.

Get used to safety

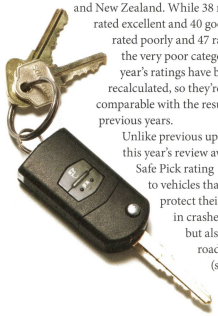
Rebecca Gatto checks out the latest in second-hand car safety testing.

According to the 2011-2020 National Road Safety Strategy, on average four people are killed and 90 seriously injured every day on Australian roads. New cars are being developed with more and more safety-assist technology, but if you're in the market for an older used car you'll need to do your research to find the safest models.

The annual Used Car Safety Ratings (UCSR), calculated by Monash University Accident Research Centre, provide essential information for consumers about the performance of vehicles when it comes to protecting you – and others – in a crash.

What's new?

The 2011 UCSR update rates 184 vehicle models, covering some of the most popular cars in Australia and New Zealand. While 38 models rated excellent and 40 good, 18 rated poorly and 47 ranked in the very poor category. This year's ratings have been recalculated, so they're not comparable with the results of previous years.



Unlike previous updates, this year's review awards a Safe Pick rating to vehicles that not only protect their drivers in crashes but also other road users (see table opposite). This rating aims to get drivers thinking about all road users, including occupants of other vehicles as well as pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists, rather than just the safety of the car's occupants. Of the models rated, 19 receive a Safe Pick and 10 of these come from the small and medium car categories. It's good to see two Australian-built large vehicles – the Ford Falcon (2008-2009) and Toyota Camry (2006-2009) – also receiving the extra rating.

You don't have to pay big bucks to buy a car with the Safe Pick rating and best possible injury protection. The small model Volvo S40 (1997-2004) is priced from $4500, the medium Mazda 6 (2002-2007) from $8000 and the Australian-made large car, Toyota Camry (2006-2009), from $11,500.

How are they calculated?

Data from more than 5.6 million vehicles in police-reported tow-away crashes and 1.2 million road users between 1982 and 2009 in Australia and NZ was collected and analysed in the latest UCSR. Crash data is matched with information on the vehicle register to determine make and model. Generally, ratings for common and/or older vehicles may be more accurate than those for newer and/or less common vehicles.

Vehicles are classified into 10 categories and rated on:

Crashworthiness, which assesses a vehicle's ability to protect its own occupants in a crash by measuring the estimated risk of death or serious injury to the driver.

Aggressivity, which assesses the ability of a vehicle to protect other road users with whom it collides. It is also measured by the estimated risk of death or serious injury to those involved, including vehicle passengers, pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists.

Total secondary safety combines crashworthiness and aggressivity to determine a vehicle's overall injury outcome in a crash. This rating measures the estimated risk of death or serious injury to all road users. ■

Nutshell

- *This year, the annual Used Car Safety Ratings (UCSR) rated 184 second-hand cars for safety.*
- *Safe Pick ratings are now awarded to used cars that provide good protection to the driver as well as to other road users.*

Log on to **choice.com.au/usedcarsafety** to see the complete results from the 2011 Used Car Safety Ratings update.

BEFORE YOU BUY

- **Combine UCSR with other sources of information** such as that from NRMA Motoring and Services or greenvehicleguide.gov.au, which has useful data on emissions and fuel consumption for car models.
- **Take time to research** and inspect the vehicle.
- **Don't forget to also consider the cost of registration**, insurance, regular maintenance and running costs.
- **Inspect before you buy** and, if possible, obtain a third-party inspection. Check the exterior, engine bay and interior and ask to take the car for a test drive. Always inspect the car in full daylight.
- **Is it worth the price?** Sites such as drive.com.au and carsguide.com.au have free car valuation calculators that give estimated valuations for private sale, trade-in and dealer prices.
- **A REVS search** can reveal if the car you're interested in is carrying a debt and could be repossessed. To conduct a REVS search, you'll need the registration, vehicle identification (VIN) and engine numbers. For a small fee, you can obtain a search certificate that provides legal protection for as long as you own the car, provided you finalise the purchase by midnight the following day.
- **Ask questions about the vehicle's history** How many owners has it had? Has it been in any crashes? Is it registered and insured? Does it have electronic stability control, anti-lock braking system, traction control and brake assist? Also find out if the car has other safety features such as crumple zones, collapsible steering, front, side and curtain airbags and advanced seat belt systems.
- **Be careful if buying privately** If you buy through a dealer, a three-month statutory warranty is usually offered. Visit choice.com.au/buyingausedcar to find out more about your rights and responsibilities when buying a used car.

FIVE-STAR VEHICLES

	Make/model/year range	Safe Pick
SMALL CARS	**Honda** Civic 06-09	✓
	Peugeot 307 01-09	✓
	Volkswagen Golf/Bora 99-04	✓
	Volkswagen Golf/Jetta 04-09	✓
	Volvo S40/V40 97-04	✓
MEDIUM CARS	**BMW** 5 Series E39 96-03	✓
	Honda Accord 03-07	✓
	Mazda 6 02-07	✓
	Saab 900/9-3 94-02	✓
	Saab 9000 86-97	✓
	Honda Accord 99-02	
	Honda Prelude 97-02	
	Subaru Liberty/Legacy/Outback 03-09	
LARGE CARS	**Ford** Falcon FG 08-09	✓
	Toyota Camry 06-09	✓
	Mercedes Benz E-Class W210 96-02	
	Mitsubishi Magna TL/TW/Verada KL/KW 03-05	
PEOPLE MOVERS	**Honda** Odyssey 95-00	
	Kia Carnival 99-06	
	Toyota Tarago/Previa/Estima 00-06	
COMPACT 4WDs	**Honda** CR-V 02-06	✓
	Subaru Forester 02-08	✓
	Toyota RAV4 06-09	
MEDIUM 4WDs	**Mitsubishi** Pajero NM/NP/NS 00-06	✓
	Ford Territory SX/SY 04-09	
	Nissan Pathfinder/Terrano/Regulus 95-05	
	Toyota Landcruiser Prado 96-03	
	Toyota Landcruiser Prado 03-09	
LARGE 4WDs	**Jeep** Grand Cherokee WJ/WG 99-05	✓
	Land Rover Discovery 91-02	
	Nissan Patrol/Safari 98-09	
UTES	**Ford/Mazda** Ranger/BT-50 06-09	✓
	Mitsubishi Triton ML/MN 06-09	✓
	Mitsubishi Triton MK 96-06	
	Nissan Navara 05-09	
	Toyota HiLux 05-09	
VANS	**Ford** Transit 01-07	✓
	Volkswagen Caravelle/Transporter 95-04	

USING THE TABLE Results are taken from the *Buyers Guide to Used Car Safety Ratings 2011*, which is funded by the Vehicle Safety Research Group. Conducted by Monash University Accident Research Centre and is supported by Australian and New Zealand motoring organisations, federal and state governments, the NRMA Motoring & Services, RACQ and RACV. The makes and models that appear here are those that receive the five-star rating. These models have statistically equivalent safety performance to the best 5% of all models, the benchmark group. No models in the Light Cars category received a five-star rating. Models that receive a Safe Pick rating also cause less serious injury to other road users with whom they collide, including drivers, pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists. No models in the Light Cars or People Movers categories received a Safe Pick rating.

Vital vitamin

Vitamin D deficiency has been described as a pandemic. Are you at risk too, asks **Karina Bray**?

Nutshell

- Mild vitamin D deficiency is surprisingly common in Australia.
- The main source of vitamin D is sun exposure, but the amount you need varies according to where you live.

Vitamin D deficiency is increasingly reported throughout the world, everywhere from northern Europe to the sunnier climes of Asia and the Middle East. And while the vitamin's importance for bone health is well corroborated by clinical evidence, some health gurus are deifying it as a wonder drug, able to cure anything from obesity to diabetes, Parkinson's disease and fatigue. We give you the lowdown on vitamin D, where to get it, what it does and what to do if you're not getting enough.

The D word

Vitamin D is primarily known for its role in bone health. It helps you absorb calcium and phosphate, reduces calcium loss from bones and is needed for bone growth and remodelling.

There are suggestions that it also plays an important role in other aspects of human health, especially immunity and infection control, and recent research on tuberculosis has shed light on the critical role vitamin D plays in the function of T-cells – white blood cells that fight infection in the body. It's also linked with fighting flu and other respiratory infections due to its role in the production of infection-fighting amino acids. Our main source of vitamin D comes from sunlight.

A steroid in the skin known as 7-dehydrocholesterol (7-DHC) is converted to vitamin D3 – called cholecalciferol – through the action of solar UVB radiation. Other minor sources of vitamin D3 are fatty fish, eggs, meat and fortified foods. Vitamin D2 (ergocalciferol) comes from fungi, and may be used in supplements.

Who's missing out?

Studies among the general population in Australia have found that 23%-49% of people have mild vitamin D deficiency, with 7%-10% suffering moderate to severe deficiency. Some people are at higher risk, including:

- **People who are housebound or living in a long-term care facility**, such as a nursing home, or shift workers who sleep through the

Up to 49% of Australians have a mild vitamin D deficiency, with 7%-10% suffering a moderate to severe deficiency

day. Studies have found that up to 77% of aged-care home residents are deficient.

- **People with naturally dark skin.** Dark skin has a sun protection factor (SPF) of up to 15 – the equivalent of wearing SPF15 sunscreen. In sunny equatorial regions this isn't such a problem, but dark-skinned people living further north or south may need supplements.
- **People who cover themselves** for religious or cultural reasons, or due to increased risk of skin cancer or other skin conditions.
- **People who live in southern parts of Australia** have a higher risk than those in the north, although northern Australians may also be at risk due to skin cancer prevention measures.
- **Obese people.** Vitamin D is readily taken up by fat cells, and it is believed that obese people have vitamin D stored in body fat instead of doing what it should be doing elsewhere in the body.
- **Elderly people** have lower concentrations of the 7-DHC in their skin and need more sun than younger people. To avoid skin damage, supplements are a safer option.
- **People with certain diseases or conditions** suffer from reduced vitamin D absorption and/or synthesis, including Crohn's disease, coeliac disease, inflammatory bowel disease, cystic fibrosis, chronic pancreatitis, and kidney or liver disease. Certain medications also contribute to vitamin D deficiency, including rifampicin (an antibiotic) and anticonvulsants.

Bones, blood pressure and more

The most common results of vitamin D deficiency are rickets (softening of the bones during childhood), osteomalacia (softening of the bones in adults, which causes pain in the bones, and often in joints and muscles) and osteoporosis. These issues in turn can lead to bone fractures, which can mean the end of independent living for the elderly.

Vitamin D deficiency is also blamed for many other health defects not related to our bones. People living further from the equator, where there are lower UV radiation levels, are at increased risk of multiple sclerosis, type 1 diabetes, high blood pressure, tuberculosis, schizophrenia and depression, all of which have been linked with vitamin D levels in at least one study. Low levels of vitamin D have also been associated with increased risk of developing colorectal, breast, prostate and other cancers, as well as the metabolic syndrome.

Conversely, giving vitamin D supplements to people at risk of deficiency has been found to reduce the risk of multiple sclerosis and certain cancers, and prevent falls in the elderly.

But many of these findings are based on preliminary research, and some authorities have questioned the benefits of vitamin D beyond bone health and falls prevention.

A review by the National Prescribing Service points out that many of the studies are observational, have design limitations or are contradictory.

A recent review of more than 1000 studies by the US Institute of Medicine reported a general lack of evidence for a causal relationship between vitamin D deficiency and many of the associated disorders mentioned above – that is, it cannot be proven that vitamin D deficiency actually causes the problem. They were also critical of claims for benefits from taking unnecessary supplements, describing them as "overblown", and concluded there were no health guarantees other than for healthy bones (in conjunction with adequate calcium).

5-6 min

The amount of morning or afternoon sun exposure recommended in summer if you have fair skin and live in Perth

40-47 min

The recommended morning or afternoon sun exposure in winter if you live in Hobart

MORNING SUNSHINE!

When you go out for your daily dose of vitamin D, you might like to consider taking a morning, rather than afternoon, stroll. A study in mice has found that propensity to skin cancer fluctuates according to circadian rhythms. Mice are more like to get skin cancer when exposed to UV radiation in the morning, thanks to low levels of an enzyme that repairs UV damage. Researchers have hypothesised that humans likely have higher levels of the enzyme in the morning (the opposite of mice, which are nocturnal) and may be less susceptible to cancer from UV damage in the morning than the afternoon. Further research is planned.

Testing times

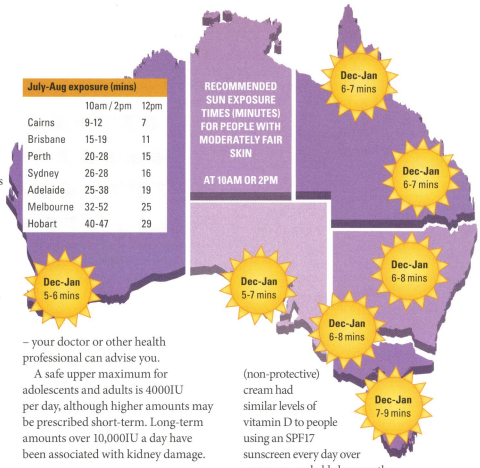
Vitamin D deficiency is largely symptomless, and may not be suspected unless the individual suffers an unusual fracture (see Chance Discovery, below), or has one or more risk factors. Deficiency can be determined by measuring the levels of 25-OHD, the main form of vitamin D in the blood, with 25-50nmol/L considered a mild deficiency.

Pills and potions

If you're at risk of vitamin D deficiency, you could consider taking a supplement, with experts recommending a minimum of 400IU, and preferably 800IU, per day. Vitamin D supplements are cheap – about 10c-16c a day – and usually come in a dose of 1000IU.

Many multivitamins contain vitamin D, but not in the amount required for preventing or treating deficiency. Also, vitamin D2 is considered less potent than vitamin D3. Greater amounts are needed for people with a diagnosed deficiency, possibly in conjunction with calcium – your doctor or other health professional can advise you.

A safe upper maximum for adolescents and adults is 4000IU per day, although higher amounts may be prescribed short-term. Long-term amounts over 10,000IU a day have been associated with kidney damage.



How much sun?

One of the main reasons offered for the widespread vitamin D deficiency is zealous use of sunscreen and other sun protection – in other words, we've taken up advice to slip, slop and slap too well.

Some have rejected this suggestion. One study from 1995 found that people using a placebo (non-protective) cream had similar levels of vitamin D to people using an SPF17 sunscreen every day over summer – probably because they didn't use enough or reapply as often as necessary. But sunscreens these days tend to have a higher SPF (30+ is the norm) and besides this, people are likely spending more time indoors, particularly recreation time.

It's recommended you get five to 15 minutes of sunlight to your unprotected face, hands and arms four to six times a week outside the hours of 10am-2pm (11am-3pm daylight saving time). However, this also depends on where you live, your skin colour, age and other factors. The map (see above) provides recommendations based on latitude – people with dark skin may need three to four times as long.

Chance discovery

Lynne Harris, an active and healthy 47 year old, was playing soccer one afternoon and suffered a broken arm when she was hit by the ball. The health professionals who looked at the fracture were surprised she'd got a fracture from the ball, but it wasn't until almost a year later, when having general blood tests, that a mild vitamin D deficiency was discovered.

Having been diagnosed in her 20s with a skin condition called disseminated superficial actinic porokeratosis (DSAP), which is made worse by exposure to the sun, she had been using sunscreen on her face and arms, avoiding the midday sun as much as possible and wearing long sleeves. When diagnosed with DSAP and sun avoidance was recommended, no-one had discussed the potential deficit of vitamin D or the need for supplements.

Lynne now takes 2000 IU of vitamin D in winter (less in summer) along with 1000mg of calcium each day.

CHOICE verdict

It's definitely a good idea to get enough vitamin D for bone health, whether through safe exposure to sun or supplements, and this may confer additional preventative health benefits. But too much sun poses its own risks, and taking vitamin D supplements other than to avoid deficiency is not going to make you any healthier. ■

Caught out

Are the big supermarkets' sustainable fish-sourcing strategies bona fide or merely a marketing hook? **Elise Dalley** finds out.

The lack of meaningful standards and labelling laws around sustainable seafood is allowing supermarkets to make sweeping claims about their seafood's credentials.

This year, both Woolworths and Coles have spruiked their commitment to sustainable seafood, even though in fact the majority of their product range may not be certified.

On its website Woolworths states its "aim" is to have all its seafood come from sustainable sources. However, to date only 15 of its 74 tinned and frozen seafood products have been approved by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) – a global standard-setting and certification organisation that endorses sustainable fisheries, brands and retailers.

Coles signed a charter with the WWF in March, committing the supermarket chain to developing a sustainable seafood improvement plan. The plan includes working with the MSC – Coles stocks 11 MSC-certified products – and the Europe-based Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC).

What exactly the ASC is contributing is unclear at this stage, as it is not yet fully operational and has set aquaculture standards for just nine species.

Woolworths and Coles both stock a small range of pole- and line-caught tuna and have made the move from yellowfin tuna to the more sustainable skipjack species, though both source skipjack from fisheries that use the purse-seine netting method, which also catches juvenile fish and threatened species.

15 of Woolworths' 74 seafood products are Marine Stewardship Council certified

Aldi too makes broad claims of sustainability, but only 17 out of a total 46 of its products are MSC certified.

17 of Aldi's 46 products are MSC certified

Australian Marine Conservation Society campaigns officer Tooni Mahto tells CHOICE the biggest problem with the labelling system in Australia is it uses only the common name of the fish.

"If the actual species is not identified and a customer is concerned about choosing seafood that does not adversely affect the health of the oceans, they can't be confident they are purchasing something they actually want to."

Woolworths, Coles and Aldi have their own labelling policies for in-house brands, but Mahto argues all three retailers fall short of the ideal.

"The gold standard of seafood labelling would be to clearly identify the species of seafood for sale, how it was caught or farmed and which company was responsible for getting the product onto the supermarket shelf."

Woolworths spokesperson Siobhan Quinn says this information is not necessary for consumers. "We've found that information such as production and catch methods, fisheries, jurisdiction and scientific species names is good for supply chain managers and decision-makers, but not as helpful to the average customer wanting to make a sustainable choice." ■

Hey baby

Not all organic baby food products are created equal, as **Rachel Clemons** discovers.

For details of all 136 products reviewed and tips for making your own baby food, visit choice.com.au/babyfood

Parents want the best for their baby, and when it comes to buying baby food, sales figures indicate this increasingly means choosing organic – even though it means paying a premium. The organic share of the baby food market is growing worldwide; of the 250-plus baby foods we saw on the shelves (not including formula, cereal or juices), about half were organic.

Buying certified organic guarantees you're limiting your baby's exposure to conventional pesticides, chemical fertilisers, hormones and antibiotics and supporting environmentally friendly methods of farming. But are all organic baby foods created equal? We reviewed eight widely available organic baby food brands – covering 136 different varieties for babies up to 12 months (see page 40) – and discovered there's more to (or sometimes less of) these products than meets the eye.

100% organic?

A product with up to five per cent of non-organic ingredients can still be labelled certified organic according to organic standards, so don't assume any product is 100% organic. The fig in Organic Bubs Pumpkin, Apricot & Fig isn't organic, for example. Neither is the cherry juice in Heinz Organic Apple Berry Blush or the ricotta and parmesan cheeses in its Butternut Pumpkin Pilaf. And non-organic ingredients in the Rafferty's Garden Organic Super Hero range include the avocado in Pear + Banana + Avocado, the cheese in Carrot & Cheddar Mash and the parsnip in Beef & Veggie Puree.

Through thick and thin

Water and thickeners are often added to baby food to get the right consistency and texture. Some water may be used in cooking and is needed to thin ingredients such as potatoes, corn or peas. And ingredients such as ground rice, rice flour, cornflour and rice starch can have a thickening effect and help keep the product from separating. But water and thickeners can also displace more nutrient-dense ingredients. Babies need a high-nutrient diet, so the more real food in a product, the better.

All brands we reviewed include some single fruit or vegetable products or simple fruit, veg and meat combinations that are close enough to 100% of those

ingredients – sometimes with a little water for the right consistency. But it's still worth checking the ingredients list and choosing carefully. Holle's Pumpkin & Chicken, for example, is just 38% those ingredients – the rest is water, rice flour and rice starch.

Comparing more complex meal products to determine which have the most real food is not so simple, especially when you're trying to juggle a wonky trolley, shopping list and crying baby.

Labelling letdown

We scrutinised the labels of all these products and found two issues that make it difficult for parents to make fully informed decisions about the foods they buy for their babies.

% ingredients

Under Australian food-labelling laws, manufacturers must list ingredients on the label in descending order of weight. But they only need to declare the percentage of "characterising" ingredients mentioned in the product name or pictured on the label.

How informative labels are varies between brands. Happy Baby (an American brand) gives no percentage ingredient details; by contrast, Green Monkey, Organic Bubs and Organix (an English brand made in France) go beyond the legal requirement and list percentages for all ingredients – so you know exactly what you're getting for your money.

Product names don't always reflect exactly what's in the recipe. Organic Bubs Apple & Berry Bircher Muesli, for example, is actually 50% banana. And Happy Baby Super Salmon is predominantly sweet potato, carrot, potato and brown rice pasta, with salmon coming in sixth on the ingredients list.

The ingredient most commonly included in a baby food recipe, but left out of the product name, is apple. Apple is the major ingredient in Rafferty's Garden Organic Super Hero Beetroot & Veggie Puree, while Organix Banana & Mango is 59% apple puree. Only Organic Mango Custard, Peach Mango Sunset and Mango Rice Pudding all contain more apple than mango. And the two major ingredients in Heinz Organic Creamy Vanilla Rice are apple juice and apples.

31%
How much more paid on average for organic baby foods compared with non-organic

27%
The amount of banana in Holle Organic Banana with Semolina

$108.5m
The value of the "wet" baby food market in Australia in 2010*

*SOURCE: RETAIL WORLD ANNUAL REPORT 2011

Smart selections

Check carefully whether all or only some ingredients are certified organic if you want a 100% organic product.

Don't be swayed by claims of "no added artificial..." Vitamin C is often added to make up for losses in processing and acts as an antioxidant to prevent fats going rancid and fruit and veg turning brown. But food regulations mean you won't find additives such as preservatives, colours and flavours in any foods for children under 12 months.

Concerned about sugar or salt? Only one organic product we looked at (Only Organic Creamy Rice Pudding) had added sugar. But many contain fruit juice concentrate, which can act as a sweetener and isn't as nutrient-dense as fruit. By law, all baby foods must contain less than 100mg of sodium per 100g.

Check the ingredients list The ingredient present in the largest amount comes first and so on down to the smallest. At the very least the ingredients in the food's name should have their percentage declared.

Work out how much of the product is the food ingredients you want and how much is water and/or thickener, which for most products should be low down the ingredients list or not there at all.

Think about what you'd put in it if you were making the food at home If there are too many other ingredients of questionable value, there may be better choices on the shelf.

Choose products that are age/stage appropriate for your baby Moving from smooth, pureed foods to chunkier textures and finger foods helps assist with jaw and speech development. It's important to move through these stages at your baby's pace and stage of development.

Refrigerate after opening and use within a day or two and never reheat already heated or eaten-from foods.

On the top shelf

Holle

biolivingcom.au

- **Price we paid** $3.30/125g jar; $3.99-$4.25/190g jar; $4.70-$4.75/220g jar
- **Product varieties** 33
- **Stages/ages** From 4, 6, 7 and 8 months
- **Made in** Slovakia
- **Labelling** Percentages of characterising ingredients are given on the ingredients list. A number of products make a "no thickeners" claim but contain ingredients such as rice flour or rice starch, which can have a thickening effect. Ingredients included in the product name and other ingredients such as vegetables, fruit and meat frequently make up less than 50% of the product; the rest is mainly water, juice concentrate, flour or starch.

Heinz Organic

heinzforbaby.com.au

- **Price we paid** $1.45/110g jar; $2.10/170g jar
- **Product varieties** 20
- **Stages/ages** 4-6 months and older; all ages from 6 months; 7-9 months; 10-15 months
- **Made in** Australia
- **Labelling** Percentages of main ingredients such as vegetables, fruit and meats (including those mentioned in product name) are given on the ingredients list. The product name doesn't always reflect the major ingredients. For example, the two largest ingredients in Creamy Vanilla Rice are apple juice and apples. And Spinach, Pumpkin & Ricotta contains more tomatoes, sweet potato, onion, zucchini and sweetcorn than spinach. Heinz told us its Creamy Vanilla Rice will be renamed to include reference to its fruit content, and a newly reformulated and renamed version of Spinach, Pumpkin & Ricotta will be available from February.

Happy Baby

biolivingcom.au

- **Price we paid** $2.65/99g pouch; $2.79-$2.95/113g/114g pouches
- **Product varieties** 11
- **Stages/ages** stage 1, starting solids; stage 2, simple combos from 6 months; stage 3, balanced meals from 7 months
- **Made in** USA
- **Labelling** Percentages of ingredients aren't listed; the manufacturer told us it's in the process of re-labelling to include these details. The product name doesn't always reflect the major ingredients. For example, Super Salmon is predominantly sweet potato, carrot, potato and brown rice pasta.

Green Monkey

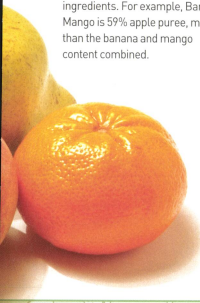
greenmonkey.co.nz

- **Price we paid** $2.49/100g pouch
- **Product varieties** 5
- **Stages/ages** 4 months and older; 6 months and older
- **Made in** New Zealand
- **Labelling** The percentage of each ingredient is clearly listed.

Organix

organix.com

- **Price we paid** $7.20-$7.55/400g (4x 100g tubs)
- **Product varieties** 6
- **Stages/ages** from 4 months
- **Made in** France
- **Labelling** The percentage of each ingredient is clearly listed. The product name doesn't always reflect the major ingredients. For example, Banana & Mango is 59% apple puree, more than the banana and mango content combined.



Only Organic

onlyorganic.co.nz

- **Price we paid** $1.35-$2.19/110g jar; $1.79-$3.25/120g pouch; $1.96-$2.80/170g jar $2.59/190g jar
- **Product varieties** 39
- **Stages/ages** 4+, 6+ and 9+ months
- **Made in** New Zealand
- **Labelling** Percentages of characterising ingredients are given on the ingredients list. The product name doesn't always reflect the major ingredients. For example, Pear and Mango contains 60% apple and just 40% pear and mango, and Mango Custard, Peach Mango Sunset and Mango Rice Pudding all contain more apple than mango. Only Organic told us its products are currently being reviewed for label accuracy.

Organic Bubs

organicbubs.com

- **Price we paid** $1.89/120g pouch
- **Product varieties** 12, with five additional varieties being lauched this December
- **Stages/ages** 4+ and 6+ months
- **Made in** Australia
- **Labelling** The percentage of each ingredient is clearly listed. The product name doesn't always reflect the major ingredients. For example, Apple & Berry Bircher Muesli is 50% banana, and Pumpkin, Apricot & Fig contains more apple (39%) than apricot (13%).

Rafferty's Garden Organic Super Hero

raffertysgarden.com

- **Price we paid** $1.98/120g pouch
- **Product varieties** 10
- **Stages/ages** 4+ and 6+ months
- **Made in** Australia
- **Labelling** Percentages of characterising ingredients are given on the ingredients list. The product name doesn't always reflect the major ingredients. For example, apple is the most prominent ingredient in Beetroot & Veggie Puree, while the most prominent ingredients in Mango Chicken Puree (after water) are sweet potato and corn.

CHOICE verdict

Some organic baby food products contain more real food than others, and when you're paying a premium for organic ingredients, it's good to know exactly what you're getting. Not all brands make this clear and easy. CHOICE would like to see full percentage ingredient disclosure on all foods designed for the most vulnerable consumers of all – babies and young children. ■

Ask the Experts

Got a niggling question our team can help with?

I recently heated some Milo for my son in a mug labelled "microwave safe". After microwaving it for a minute, I picked it up and the handle was so hot I dropped it. What does microwave safe actually mean?

CHOICE's home economist Fiona Mair replies: Putting a microwave-safe container into the microwave means it shouldn't overheat, break, melt or cause burns when handled. However, microwave-safe containers may only be suitable for reheating, not cooking or boiling food.

Foods high in fat and sugar can cause a microwave-safe container to become extremely hot. Use heat-resistant glass containers and always protect your hands when removing cooked food. Avoid plastic containers for cooking, and only use microwave-safe plastic containers for reheating on a medium power level.

Fiona Mair

If you're using a container in the microwave for the first time, double-check it's microwave safe. You can do this by placing it in the microwave with no food or liquid, along with a small microwave-safe container filled with water. Heat for one minute on high, and if the outside of the container has not heated then it's safe to use. If it's warm it can be used for reheating, but if it's hot it isn't microwave-safe. Permanently mark any non-microwave-safe containers with a red cross for future reference.

I have an iPod Touch with iOS version 1.1.5 (4B1). At home I can access Safari, Google Mail, Weather and the net via my router. However, when I go to YouTube and attempt to play a video I receive this message: "Safari can't open the page because the address is invalid." When I'm in a "hot spot", however, I can access YouTube.

CHOICE Computer expert Steve Duncombe replies: Originally, the iPod Touch couldn't play videos directly on YouTube via Safari because YouTube used Adobe Flash software encoding for its videos, and the iOS (which runs on the iPod Touch) doesn't support Flash. So Apple provided a YouTube app on the iPod Touch to play YouTube videos. YouTube then began converting its content to a supported format so it could be played on iOS devices via Safari. Meanwhile, Apple issued several software updates for the iPod Touch that eventually took it all the way up to version 3.1.3.

Steve Duncombe

Even if you want to stay on the currently installed software, hook it up to iTunes on the computer it's normally synchronised with and make sure it does a backup and sync (which is normal) then a restore via iTunes. It's a good idea to then do any software upgrades via iTunes to bring it up to the most recent iOS software for that device.

Many cosmetic foundations and tinted moisturisers now contain sunscreen. I work indoors all day and use these products, and am wondering if regular use has any health risks?

CHOICE health expert Karina Bray replies: The two main concerns with sunscreens are nanoparticles and endocrine-disrupting effects. Based on research to date, we don't believe either presents a reason to avoid sunscreens.

Nanoparticles, potentially found in zinc oxide or titanium dioxide sunscreens as well as some mineral make-up products, may present a risk if they penetrate the skin's outer layer in large quantities. There's no conclusive evidence this occurs, though research is ongoing.

Some years ago it was proposed that chemical sunscreens such as octyl methoxycinnamate and 4-MBC may mimic hormones and have endocrine-disrupting effects. However, the research upon which this was based, though widely cited, has not been replicated and has been criticised for technical flaws. A subsequent review of sunscreens by the European Scientific Committee on Consumer Safety concluded there was no evidence they have hormonal effects that could affect human health.

Karina Bray

Ask us

Do you have a question for one of CHOICE's experts? Email us at asktheexperts@choice.com.au or write to us at Ask the Experts, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Rd, Marrickville, NSW 2204.

Lab Tests

Suitcases, portable air conditioners and barbecues – they're all on test here

Can I get all this into the overhead compartment? Find out on page 48

CHOICE's Rebecca Gatto puts the squeeze on carry-on suitcases

44 Barbecues
All models great and small

48 Suitcases
Best on board

51 Self-winding hose reels
Nifty or novelty?

52 Portable air conditioners
As cool as they are convenient?

54 Fridges
Find out which models fail to meet their own energy claims

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The modern take on an old classic

60 Safety gates & barriers
Peace of mind in your home?

62 Smartphones
Apple's much-hyped iPhone 4S gets the CHOICE treatment

65 TVs
We screen all popular sizes

69 Camcorders
Capture your magic moments in HD

72 Media players
Do you still need one?

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CHOICE has its own testing laboratories where our experienced technical staff puts products through their paces. We use test methods based on Australian standards, and we develop our own to match the way consumers use a product in their homes. We buy the products we test, maintaining our independence from manufacturers, and so we know what you're faced with in the shops. Our recommendations are based on a product's quality and performance, with no hidden bias.

CHOICE SHOPPER
For the best deal on products where you see this logo, call 1300 360 655. Have the model name and number, the price you've been quoted and your CHOICE subscriber number.

CHOICE ONLINE
Wherever you see a mouse icon, there is more information about this test at **choice.com.au**.

CHOICE BEST BUY Our testers award a product a Best Buy if it delivers high quality at a comparatively low price. Not every test report includes Best Buys.

Best Buy

CHOICE GREEN BUY Our researchers award a Green Buy to a product that delivers good quality and environmental performance. Not every test report includes Green Buys.

Green Buy

Smokin' hot

Nutshell

- We test portable, balcony-sized and large four-burner barbecues to suit any situation.
- The stand-out performers on test make barbecuing even more rewarding.

Make every day a weekend with our top-rated barbecues, says **Martha Psiroukis**.

Barbecuing is one of the most enjoyable means of cooking, so don't leave it just for impromptu weekend get-togethers. Take advantage of longer days and balmy evenings by cooking mid-week meals on your barbecue. Buy a good portable model that's a pleasure to use, and you may even be tempted to get into the great outdoors more and use it for day or camping trips.

Choosing carefully is the key to good barbecuing and maximum value for money. You get what you pay for with the Billabong, the cheapest on test. While an excellent performer for closed hood barbecuing, it's very poor for evenness and isn't easy to use. It's also difficult to move as it tips over easily. The trolley only has one set of wheels and there are no handles, so moving the barbecue must be done by handling the flimsy side table. Because it has a high centre of gravity and needs to be lifted on one side to be wheeled to a new position, its tipping point creeps up on you very quickly, hitting your legs in the process. We think it's unsafe to move this barbecue with only one person, and it definitely should not be moved while it's hot.

Our Best Buys (see opposite) on the other hand are a delight to use, with a reasonable purchase price and very good fuel efficiency.

Safety tip

Check for gas leaks by spraying or brushing a soapy water solution onto the hose and connections – bubbles will form if gas is escaping. For our complete list, see choice.com.au/bbqsafety

Most compact, cheapest to run large barbecue

WHAT TO BUY

88%

Weber Q320, $699

Best Buy

Good points

- Excellent for roasting a chicken and cooking marinated chicken wings, sausages and steaks
- Excellent evenness over the whole cooking surface
- Good access to the cooking area
- No smoke is directed into your face
- Side tables fold away when not needed
- Very fuel efficient
- Very easy to assemble and manoeuvre
- Hood thermometer is accurate

Bad points

- Cleaning around the burners can be awkward
- No side panels to protect food from draughts

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Hotplates, grills and burners Cast-iron hotplates are more susceptible to rust. If you live in a coastal area, enamelled or stainless-steel hotplates are recommended (see table, page 47).

Handles should be far enough from the hot lid panel behind that you don't burn your hand.

The **fat tray** should be easy to remove and replace, and be self-centring to catch all the fat.

Controls should be clearly labelled and have positive stops at both the low and high

Best traditional large barbecue

For the balcony and the regular picnicker

Best Buy

81%
Cordon Bleu Deluxe CD4CWWH, $999

Good points
- Excellent for cooking marinated chicken wings and roasting a chicken
- No smoke is directed into your face
- Has a glass viewing window in the hood
- Has large side tables
- Very easy to manoeuvre
- Relatively large cooking area (but good evenness)

Bad points
- Very expensive to run
- Side tables can become hot

87%
Weber Baby Q100E LP, $299

Good points
- Excellent for roasting a chicken and cooking marinated chicken wings, sausages and steaks
- Lightweight and easy to lift
- Very easy to assemble
- No smoke is directed into your face
- Portable – optional trolley ($89.95) folds down for wheeling the barbecue
- Very fuel efficient
- Excellent evenness over the whole cooking surface

Bad points
- Only has a char-grill plate, although a breakfast plate ($27.95) can be bought separately
- Cleaning around the burners can be awkward
- The manual piezo button requires some pressure
- No side panels to protect the food from draughts

80%
Everdure E2GO, $399

Good points
- Excellent for cooking sausages and marinated chicken wings
- Very good for cooking steak and roasting a chicken
- Easy and quick to assemble and clean
- No smoke is directed into your face
- Very fuel efficient
- Good access to food
- Excellent evenness over the whole cooking surface

Bad points
- Food can slide off slanted hotplate
- Has no char-grill so food is not exposed to the flame as with a typical BBQ
- No side panels to protect food from draughts
- Unable to see flame in operation
- Metal utensils can't be used on non-stick surface – silicon only

positions, so you don't accidentally turn a burner off when adjusting the heat. **Side panels** protect the food and flame from draughts on windy days. Look for **sunken side-burners** to avoid them being blown out.

Hood closure resistance / stability prevents the hood banging shut on a windy day. **Optional accessories** such as pizza stones, breakfast plates and rotisseries can add versatility. For more on what to look for, go to choice.com.au/bbq.

OTHER WHAT TO BUY MODELS

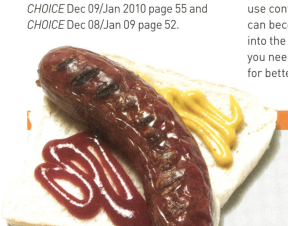
The barbecues here are those we've previously tested and recommended (see issue in brackets) that are still available. Our Best Buys here and above are good performers, with a good purchase price combined with a low five-year running cost.

SMALL/PORTABLE

- **Everdure** Neo Buddy Patio NBUDLPC-09 (*CHOICE*, Dec 10/Jan 11) — Best Buy — $299
- **Weber** Q200 with trolley cart (*CHOICE*, Dec 08/Jan 09) — $479

ABOUT THE REST

Most newly tested models are good performers overall, despite not making our What to Buy list. To see more information on previously tested models, see *CHOICE* Dec 10/Jan 2011 page 48, *CHOICE* Dec 09/Jan 2010 page 55 and *CHOICE* Dec 08/Jan 09 page 52.



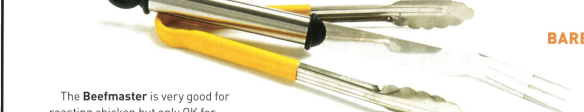
LARGE

While the **Masport** is very good for cooking marinated chicken wings and barbecuing a whole chicken, it's only OK for cooking sausages. Its four castors make moving the barbecue relatively easy, and it has very easy to use controls. However, its side tables can become hot and smoke is directed into the face when the hood is up. And you need to remove the food warmer for better access to the back.

The **Beefeater 900 Series 4 Burner** is very good for roasting chicken but only OK for ease of use as smoke is directed into your face when the hood is up and you need to remove the food warmer for better access to the back hotplate. Its side tables have no handles and are uncomfortable to grip when moving the barbecue, its thermostat is not accurate and the side tables can become hot. It's also expensive to run.

	COSTS		PERFORMANCE							FEATURES				
	Price ($)	Running cost ($ / five years)	Overall score (%)	Cooking performance score (%)	Evenness score (steak) (%)	Evenness with high fat cooking score (sausages) (%)	Low temperature score (%)	Roasting score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Warming rack	Reversible cooking plate	Side burner	Side tray / folding	Natural gas option
LARGE														
#Weber Q320 (A)	699	668	88	98	90	100	100	100	74				✓/✓	
#Cordon Bleu Deluxe CD4CWWH	999	2003	81	84	70	75	100	90	76	✓	✓		✓/-	
Matador Executive MKII S/S MBQ1002	599	1745	77	78	80	60	80	90	76	✓	✓	✓	✓/-	✓
#Masport Elite Plus 552595	879	1684	73	75	70	65	80	85	69	✓	✓	✓	✓/-	
#Beefeater 900 Series 4 Burner 48942	1000	2003	72	74	70	75	65	85	68	✓	✓	✓	✓/(F)	
#Beefmaster BR4CH	499	2094	71	71	70	65	65	85	71	✓	✓		✓/-	
Everdure Figura Esee	799	1669	71	76	60	55	90	100	64	✓		✓	✓/-	
SMALL / PORTABLE														
#Weber Baby Q100E LP (B)	299	258	87	95	90	90	100	100	74				-/-	
Everdure Buddy Patio NBUDLPC-09	299	273	82	91	75	90	100	100	68				-/-	
Weber Q200 (C)	479	485	82	90	80	80	100	100	70				✓/✓	✓
#Everdure E2GO (D)	399	364	80	89	80	90	100	85	66				✓/(G)	
#Sunbeam GB2100	399	410	79	85	70	80	100	90	70	✓			✓/✓	
Coleman RoadTrip Grill 9949-750XA (E)	350	698	76	75	80	65	80	na	78				✓/(H)	
Beefeater Sportsgrill – Portable 2 Burner Gas Barbecue and Cooktop	396	546	75	78	90	70	75	na	70				✓/(J)	n
Weber 57cm One-Touch Kettle with Gas Kit	419	349	72	76	35	70	100	100	66				-/-	
#Billabong G2BBTJ	199	576	66	70	45	65	80	90	60	✓			✓/✓	

USING THE TABLE Overall score is 60% Cooking performance and 40% Ease of use **Cooking performance** The scores for cooking steak, sausages and marinated chicken wings and roasting a chicken are weighted equally. Where we could not roast a whole chicken, the results of the remaining tests are weighted equally. **Ease of use** is made up of ease of cooking: 40%; mobility, using the controls and cleaning: 20% each. **Dimensions** are measured with the hood and side trays closed (if applicable) and includes knobs, wheels and handles. **Gas consumption** is measured with all burners on high. **Price** Recommended retail, as of October 2011. **Running costs** are based on using the barbecue three times a week for 30 minutes over five years (you should expect your barbecue to last at least that long), at an average cost of $3.89/kg of LPG gas. The cost of gas is an average of what we paid for 9kg gas bottle refills during our test. For comparative purposes, our gas consumption calculations are on the barbecue's maximum setting, so actual costs will be less per year. A barbecue is generally cheaper to run on natural gas. **TABLE NOTES #** Newly tested model. **ns** Not applicable. **ns** Not stated. **(A)** This model is only available at specialist Weber dealers. Has a char-gri



The **Beefmaster** is very good for roasting chicken but only OK for cooking sausages and marinated chicken wings. Smoke is directed into the face when the hood is up, it has some sharp edges, and is expensive to run.

SMALL/PORTABLE

The **Sunbeam** is excellent for closed hood barbecuing, is easy to assemble, and no smoke is directed into your face, but can be awkward to manoeuvre because two wheels are fixed and the handle is too low. There are no side panels to protect food from draughts, it's relatively heavy for a portable BBQ, and the thermostat isn't accurate.

The **Billabong** has poor evenness when cooking steak. It's only OK for cooking sausages and is difficult to lift and manoeuvre due to the side tables being unstable and flimsy, and it's very easy to tip over. The side tables get hot, there are no side panels to protect food from drafts, the grill plate does not sit comfortably, the controls are flimsy and the thermostat is not accurate.

For more on what to look for, go to **choice.com.au/bbq**

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SPECIFICATIONS

Hotplate / grill material	Flame diffuser	Burner/s material	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	External temperatures after 60 mins (°C, controls / handle / hood)	Portable / weight (kg)	Gas consumption (kg/h)	Total cooking area (m²)	Contact
Porcelain-enamelled cast iron	None	Stainless steel	111 x 140 x 53	27 / 28 / 105	- / na	0.44	0.28	weberbbq.com.au
Cast iron	Ceramic rocks	Stainless steel	121 x 183 x 61	28 / 29 / 115	- / na	1.32	0.36	barbequesgalore.com.au
Non-stick cast iron	Aluminium	Stainless steel	119 x 171 x 63	27 / 27 / 102	- / na	1.15	0.37	bunnings.com.au
Coated cast iron	Stainless steel	Stainless steel	123 x 160 x 62	28 / 29 / 70	- / na	1.11	0.36	masport.com.au
Cast iron	Stainless steel	Stainless steel	115 x 163 x 64	34 / 28 / 103	- / na	1.32	0.36	beefeaterbbq.com
Cast iron	Stainless steel	Stainless steel	121 x 160 x 62	36 / 32 / 111	- / na	1.38	0.36	barbequesgalore.com.au
Cast iron	Aluminium-coated steel	Vitreous enamel	124 x 154 x 59	33 / 45 / 100	- / na	1.10	0.34	everdure.com
Porcelain-enamelled cast iron	None	Stainless steel	36 x 68 x 41	45 / 43 / 101	✓ / 10.5	0.17	0.18	weberbbq.com.au
Teflon-coated	None	Stainless steel	110 x 91 x 49	37 / 44 / 103	✓ / 27.1	0.18	0.17	everdure.com
Porcelain-enamelled cast iron	None	Stainless steel	99.5 x 83 x 51	22 / 33 / 113	✓ / 25.6	0.32	0.18	weberbbq.com.au
Teflon-coated	None	Stainless steel	38 x 95 x 50	40 / 47 / 122	✓ / 14.3	0.24	0.18	everdure.com
Cast iron	Enamel-coated steel	Stainless steel	103 x 128 x 57	40 / 39 / 134	✓ / 18.3	0.27	0.21	sunbeam.com.au
Enamelled cast iron	None	ns	86 x 80 x 56	34 / 36 / 186	✓ / 19.3	0.46	0.20	coleman.com
Porcelain-enamelled cast iron	None	Stainless steel	95 x 74 x 45	23 / 31 / 192	✓ / 26.0	0.36	0.23	beefeaterbbq.com
Stainless steel	None	Stainless steel	96 x 60 x 71	17 / 43 / 117	✓ / 13.9	0.23	0.23	weberbbq.com.au
Cast iron	Coated steel	Aluminium	114 x 114 x 53	45 / 50 / 118	- / na	0.38	0.20	bunnings.com.au

; hotplate available as an optional extra. We tested it with the tailor-made hotplate, $59.95. The Weber Q305 is expected to perform similarly to the Q320. Differences are a piezo ignition and a lower lid without a d thermometer. **(B)** This model is only available at specialist Weber dealers. Tested with the optional breakfast plate, $27.95. Optional mobile trolley for easy portability, $89.95. The Baby Q100 is expected to perform larly to the Q100E. Differences are a piezo ignition and a lower lid without a hood thermometer. **(C)** Tested with a mobile trolley, but can be purchased with a more stable stationary cart as used on the Weber Q320, 9.95 (rather than $89.95). The Weber Q220 is expected to perform similarly to the 200. Differences are an electronic ignition and a higher lid with a hood thermometer. **(D)** Trolley available for $149. **(E)** Name and code nge since we tested – now RoadTrip iXE Grill 1219670. **(F)** Only one side table folds down. **(G)** Storage compartment in each side table. **(H)** Side tables extend and retract under the barbecue. **(J)** Side trays can be oved and stored in the barbecue.

Carry that weight

On-board suitcases are convenient, but price doesn't always reflect quality, says **Rebecca Gatto**.

Nutshell

- CHOICE recruited three cabin crew members to put 10 on-board suitcases through their paces.
- Spending big doesn't necessarily buy you the best suitcase – the cheapest model on test does surprisingly well.

No-one knows what can go wrong with a piece of carry-on luggage better than someone who spends a lot of time packing and unpacking bags, walking briskly through airports and getting on and off planes. So CHOICE asked three airline cabin crew members to help us out with our suitcase test.

They scored these on-board suitcases on everything from packing, balance and manoeuvring to the ease of using the zipper and expanding the handle. Each suitcase was then loaded with 5kg and taken around a course that includes stairs, carpet, grass, smooth road and a rough surface. We also subjected them to a stability, drop and puncture test to assess their performance.

The suitcases on test range in price from $40 to $299. The cheapest, the Getaway, is slightly better for performance and better for ease of use than the most expensive case, the Delsey (see table below) and is our Best Buy – see page 50.

The size allowance for carry-on baggage varies slightly between airlines and between domestic and international flights. Generally, the total dimensions range from 105cm to 115cm, and this is measured by adding together the length, height and depth of the bag. All the suitcases on test claim to be suitable for carry-on luggage, but the Park Avenue and Delsey have total dimensions that exceed the requirements listed opposite. These slightly larger bags may still be OK, as often cabin baggage isn't checked by airline staff. But ask your airline before departure to avoid having to check it in if it's too big.

Safe and savvy travelling

- **The carry-on baggage allowance for domestic and international travel on the major Australian airlines is 7kg.** If you exceed this you could end up having to check in your baggage or pay an extra fee.
- **Regulations restrict the amount of liquids, aerosols and gels you can carry on international flights.** Containers can be no bigger than 100mL and must be sealed in a transparent zip-lock bag, which can't be more than 1L. Only one zip-lock bag is allowed per passenger.
- **Prohibited items** include sporting goods, kitchen utensils, tools and other objects with sharp edges or points.
- **Previously prohibited items** such as umbrellas with metal points, knitting and crochet needles, pointed metal nail files and nail clippers, corkscrews and sports racquets can now be taken through security screening points within Australia.
- **Don't leave your baggage unattended and always do your own packing.** A lock is one way to deter thieves.
- **You'll need to present documentation and identification at check-in** if you have to carry hypodermic needles.
- **Take out comprehensive travel insurance** and pack valuables in your carry-on luggage.

Samsonite Duralite Upright 52/18Exp C09*052-52cm
Lanza Windermere III 3088170 3.3kg
Skyway No Weight 3083541 International Carry-on Vertical Case
Getaway 45cm Trolley Case GET1045-1
Australian Luggage Co. Ultra Light Range LW201 45cm
Catherine Manuell Design Lightweight Suitcase SB1001RP
Antler Duolite Small Roller Case 1340755
Park Avenue Skywalker Range HY2030 50cm Trolley Case
Delsey Fiber Lite 53cm 4-Wheel Cabin Trolley Case
Tosca Orbit Collection TOR 1048-7 48cm Trolley Case
USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up of: Ease of use:

ISTOCK PHOTO

How big is your bag?

QANTAS

You can carry two 105cm bags or one 105cm bag plus a non-rigid garment bag, or one 115cm bag. Weight allowance for this service is 7kg per piece.

Virgin australia

You can carry on two bags that each don't exceed the following dimensions (height x length x depth): 34cm x 48cm x 23cm (total dimensions 105cm). One alternative is to carry a small briefcase with total dimensions of 105cm plus a non-rigid garment bag with total dimensions of 185cm. The total weight of either option must not exceed 7kg.

Jetstar

For Starter Fares (Jetstar Airways, Jetstar Asia and Valuair) you can carry on one main item with a total dimension of 115cm and another smaller item. The total combined weight must not exceed 10kg. For Jetstar Pacific flights your main item must not exceed total dimensions of 105cm with a total weight of 7kg.

rex Regional Express

You can take two bags not exceeding 34cm (height) x 48cm (length) x 23cm (depth) – total dimensions 105cm. One of these bags can be substituted for a non-rigid garment bag with total dimensions of 185cm. The total weight must not exceed 7kg.

Dimensions for Australian domestic travel

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

The **weight** of the suitcase itself counts towards your baggage allowance. The cases on test weigh between 2kg and 3.2kg.

Size The wheels and extendable handle take up some of the internal space, so check that the case has the right volume for your needs as well as its dimensions.

Sturdy construction Lifting handles that are firmly riveted to the body of the case and don't have weak points are less likely to break.

The **extendable handle** should be easy to extend and retract, comfortable to grip, lock firmly in place when extended and be a comfortable height so the case doesn't bump against your legs as you pull it along.

Wheels The case should roll easily and not bounce or tip when being pulled along.

An **expandable compartment** is very handy if you need to squeeze in a few extra items.

Internal and external pockets External ones are handy for quick access, but check they can be locked.

Extra carry handles at the base or side are helpful for when you lift the suitcase into the overhead compartment.

Zips should open and shut smoothly. The zip tags should be big enough to grip easily and have holes so you can padlock them.

Internal straps help compress and hold the contents in place. They should be a useful length and have quick-release buckles.

Water resistance Hard cases aren't necessarily more water resistant than fabric ones as water can still get through the lid joint. None of the models on test are water resistant.

FORMANCE			FEATURES				SPECIFICATIONS				
	Ease of use score (%)	Performance score (%)	Expandable compartment	Carry handle(s)	External / internal pockets	Internal straps	External dimensions (cm, length x height x depth)	Total dimensions (cm)	Internal volume (L)	Weight (kg)	Contact
	81	85	✓	1	2/3	1	54 x 35 x 24	113	32	2.7	samsoniteaustralia.com
	74	76	✓	2	2/2	2	52 x 35 x 25	112	30	3.2	strandbags.com.au
	72	81		2	1/2	2	52 x 34 x 22	108	32	2.5	strandbags.com.au
	72	76	✓	2	1/3	2	50 x 32 x 25	107	29	2.8	bigw.com.au
	68	83		2	2/2	3	48 x 35 x 25	108	29	2.4	ausluggage.com.au
	69	77		1	1/1	1	47 x 33 x 22	102	26	2.5	catherinemanuelldesign.com
	69	71	✓	1	1/1	2	54 x 36 x 20	110	29	2.0	cachegroup.com
	62	88	✓	1	2/2	1	56 x 38 x 25	119	41	3.1	ausluggage.com.au
	65	74		2	1/2	2	53 x 37 x 27	117	30	3.1	mayfairintl.com
	66	70	✓	2	2/1	2	52 x 37 x 24	113	30	3.0	toscatravel.com.au

Performance: 25%. **Price** Recommended retail, as of September 2011.

WHAT TO BUY

82%
Samsonite Duralite Upright 52/18Exp C09*052-52cm

Good points
- Good stability
- No damage in the drop test
- Rated very good in the puncture test
- Large front pocket to carry a laptop
- 10-year warranty

Bad points
- Comparatively expensive
- Only one carry handle

75%
Lanza Windermere III 3088170 3.3kg

Good points
- No damage in the drop test
- Seven-year warranty

Bad points
- Only OK for stability
- Only OK in the puncture test

74%
Skyway No Weight 3083541 International Vertical Case

Good points
- Very good stability
- No damage in the drop test
- 15-year warranty

Bad points
- Only OK in the puncture test

73%
Getaway 45cm Trolley Case GET1045-1

Good points
- Very good stability
- No damage in the drop test

Bad points
- Rated poor in the puncture test
- Three-year warranty

ZIP IT GOOD

For most suitcases, the zipper is the weakest point in what seems like a safely locked bag. It's the easiest way in for a thief – all they need is a pen. All suitcases on test can be opened with a pen except the Delsey. Its double zipper makes it tough to force open.

ABOUT THE REST

All the other suitcases are let down by their ease of use, with our cabin crew rating them only OK. Of the models in this group, the **Australian Luggage Co.** is the only one priced below $100. **Delsey**, the most expensive model on test at $299, ranks second from the bottom.

The **Catherine Manuell Design** suitcase, despite having very good stability and rating well in our puncture test, only has one carry handle, which makes lifting it into an overhead compartment more difficult. During the drop test the material surrounding its metal handle ripped slightly on one side.

The **Antler** has one large pocket at the front of the suitcase to carry a laptop. However, it only has one carry handle, is borderline for stability and scored only OK for the puncture test. The experts noted it isn't very spacious and that the expander zip needs to be used in order to fit 5kg of clothes.

The **Park Avenue** scores very well for stability, had no damage in the drop test and had the least amount of damage in the puncture test. However, the experts said the expanding handle is a little wobbly and the wheels sit too low and far back, meaning they bang on stairs and cause damage over time. It only has one carry handle.

Our experts prefer two-wheeler cases over four-wheelers. The Park Avenue and **Delsey** are the only four-wheelers on test. The experts found them more difficult to manoeuvre over grass, carpet and other rough surfaces. They also found these cases difficult to push backwards at times.

Home and hosed

Another garden chore is solved with one of these handy pieces of kit, says **Matthew Steen**.

Nutshell

- Nine retractable hose reels on test, three of which make our What to Buy list.
- Watch out for the spring-loaded snap back, otherwise you may injure yourself or someone nearby.

This summer promises to be about as hot as an Australian summer can be, and the chances are you'll be using your garden hose for a variety of reasons, from watering the lawn to washing your car.

While retractable hose reels aren't new, we thought it timely to test what's on the market. These reels come in a plastic housing, which you can trigger to draw the hose back in using an internal spring-loaded mechanism. Only one model on test, the Maze, has a slow mechanism to retract the hose. With the others, we found that you have to keep clear when you trigger the retraction, otherwise you or a bystander may be hit. It's safest to walk the hose back to the housing.

Retractable hose reels generally come as a package with the hose, spray gun and plastic connections. If you want to exchange these for brass, it'll cost you a little more. Manufacturers supply a variety of hose lengths; we tested those about 20 metres long, priced between $70 and $199.

Most hose reels have a ball installed at the hose ending, so when you retract the hose the spray gun doesn't end up inside the housing. Most can also be carried from one location to another, and some can be padlocked to a wall mounting. ■

For profiles of all reels on test go to **choice.com.au/reels**

WHAT TO BUY

77%
Hozelock 2490

Good points
- Swivel wall attachment
- Child-lock mechanism
- The hose is easy to pull out
- It's very easy to move the hose assembly from one spot to another

Bad points
- The hose can snap back quickly if yanked and then released suddenly

76%
Maze Moto 45 MR-S45-1818

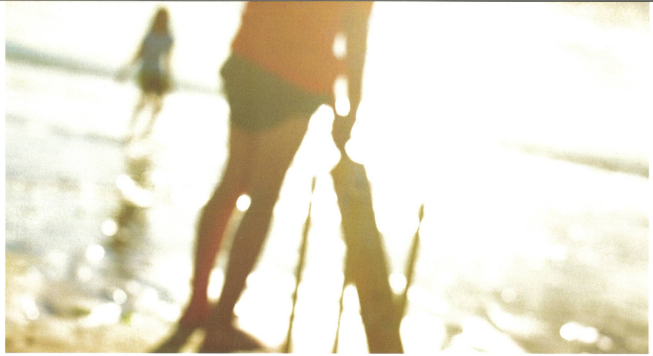
Good points
- The hose is easy to pull out and has a slow-retracting mechanism driven by the water pressure
- It's easy to move the hose assembly from one spot to another

Bad points
- No provision for a padlock so it can be stolen easily

72%
Delrico DEL-25W

Good points
- Swivel wall attachment
- It's very easy to move the hose assembly from one spot to another

Bad points
- The hose is fairly difficult to pull out and can snap back quickly if yanked and then released suddenly



Cool moves

Not all portable reverse-cycle air conditioners deliver an easy fix for summer heat and winter chill, writes **Chris Barnes**.

Nutshell

- Portable reverse-cycle air conditioners are a convenient alternative to mounted models.
- Only five of the units on test are any good at cooling, and most aren't particularly impressive at heating.

Weather forecasters are predicting a hot summer for Australia, with some heatwaves likely. Given the onset of a La Nina event, we can also expect more wet weather, so it's likely to be humid too. Air conditioners are a popular way to beat the heat and humidity of summer, and reverse-cycle models are also popular for heating in winter. While most people opt for wall-mounted split-system models, which are usually the most effective and efficient, portable units are also worth considering when permanent installation isn't possible, such as in rented homes or where local noise regulations make installation difficult. ■

Make your home as energy efficient as possible before buying an air conditioner. Roof insulation, blinds and awnings and shade trees will help. Fans are also effective at cooling you and are cheap to run.

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	Price ($)	PERFORMANCE Overall score (%)	Cooling score (%)	Heating score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Claimed cooling / heating capacities (kW)	Measured cooling power consumption (kW)	Measured heating power consumption (kW)	Noise (fan on high)
Dimplex GDC12RCWA (A)	749	74	72	77	72	3.5 / 3.5	1.2	1.0	Medium
# **Omega Altise** OAPC15RC	900	71	75	67	69	4.4 / 4.4	1.5	1.2	Quieter
Midea MPM5-12HRN1-QB	749	68	75	64	61	3.5 / 3.5	1.2	1.0	Medium
# **Convair** Climate Master CP12HS	649	65	71	60	63	3.5 / 3.5	1.2	1.1	Quieter
# **DeLonghi** PACW160HP	1399	65	64	69	63	4.4 / 3.9	1.0	0.9	Quieter
# **DeLonghi** PACWE120HP	999	62	65	56	65	3.5 / 3.0	1.0	0.9	Quieter
# **Hotpoint** MAC155	999	61	70	48	63	4.3 / 4.4	1.6	1.0	Medium
Omega Altise APC12RCVA	700	61	67	39	76	3.5 / 3.5	1.0	0.8	Medium
# **Omega Altise** APC14RCVA	800	59	54	59	64	4.1 / 4.1	1.1	0.9	Noisier

USING THE TABLE **Scores** The overall score is made up of: Cooling 40%; Heating 30%; Ease of use 30%. **Claimed cooling capacity** isn't comparable between portable and built-in air conditioners. **Measured power consumption** This is the power consumed in one hour during the heating and cooling tests. For cooling, this is the average of both cooling tests. **Fan noise** These results are comparative only; what you actually hear depends on the environment. With the fan on high, all air conditioners on test interfere with normal conversation.

WHAT TO BUY

74%
Dimplex GDC12RCWA, $749

Good points
- Good cooling and heating performance
- Easy to use overall, with convenient automatic water drainage through the duct

Bad points
- Front-heavy, so may topple over when tilted or on a slope

Note: this model is discontinued but can still be found in some stores.

71%
Omega Altise OAPC15RC, $900

Good points
- Good cooling performance
- Comparatively long power cord, duct and window kit

Bad points
- Only OK heating performance
- Comparatively high power consumption

ABOUT THE REST

The **Midea**, **Convair** and **Hotpoint** models have good cooling performance and are worth considering if that's your main use for them. However, the Hotpoint has the highest power consumption for cooling on test. The rest have only OK (or worse) cooling or heating performance.

We also tested a **Changhong CH36PB1** and a **Convair Climate Master CM15HW**, but both had such poor performance we suspect they were faulty. We have not included their results here, as we didn't have time to buy and test replacement samples.

For more details about portable air conditioners, including how we test, go to **choice.com.au/portableairconditioners**

SPECIFICATIONS

	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)*	Length of power cord (m)	Length of duct (m)	Maximum length of window kit (m)	Contact
8	85 x 48 x 34	1.8	1.3	1.27	dimplex.com.au
	82 x 45 x 42	2.2	1.5	1.42	omegaaltise.com.au
3	84 x 48 x 36	1.1	1.4	1.24	mideaair.com.au
9	84 x 42 x 39	1.8	1.4	1.05	convair.net.au
	92 x 57 x 47	1.9	1.2	0.97	delonghi.com.au
4	92 x 50 x 40	1.6	1.0	0.97	delonghi.com.au
5	82 x 46 x 38	1.8	1.6	1.82	hotpoint.com.au
2	74 x 36 x 35	2.2	1.5	1.00	omegaaltise.com.au
9	74 x 39 x 36	2.1	1.5	1.08	omegaaltise.com.au

ce Recommended retail, as of October 2011. All models are made in a. **TABLE NOTES (A)** Discontinued, but may still be available in some es. # Newly tested model. * Rounded to the nearest centimetre.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Window kit A 10cm-wide piece of plastic with a sliding extension inside and an elongated hole for the air conditioner's exhaust hose.

A **drain hose** for draining the water extracted from the cooled air. The Dimplex's drain hose is conveniently incorporated in the duct hose. The Hotpoint, Midea and Omega Altise models also come with trays for collecting drain water. All models on test except the Omega Altise OAPC15RC reuse the collected water to assist their cooling function, so you shouldn't need to empty the tank often.

Operating modes Cool, heat, dry (dehumidify) or fan only. The Dimplex lacks fan-only mode, and the Omega Altise models lack dry mode. The Omega Altise APC12RCVA and APC14RCVA have two fan speeds; the rest have three, and the Midea has an additional high speed in cooling mode. The Hotpoint, Midea and Omega Altise models can also be set to automatically adjust to a set temperature. The Midea's Follow Me feature means the remote control measures the room temperature and the automatic mode uses that as a target.

Louvres to direct airflow. Manually adjustable louvres are typical, but the Hotpoint, Midea and Omega Altise OAPC15RC also have automatically oscillating louvres.

Nutshell

- Two fridges fail to live up to their energy claims.
- In better news, we also find a French door model with two separately opening freezer drawers to recommend.

For all their faults...

Some fridges are not living up to their energy claims, as **Matthew Steen** explains.

CHOICE expects the fridges we test to live up to their running cost claims, but two in our current test, the Sharp SJ-339S-SL and Westinghouse WTM2800WB, failed to meet their claims by 13.6% and 16% respectively. Both Sharp and Electrolux, which manufactures Westinghouse, have pulled samples of these models off their production line and tested them in direct response to our test results.

The reasons for faults can be varied. If you suspect your fridge is problematic, don't hesitate to bring a suspected fault to the manufacturers' attention. In this case, Sharp and Electrolux claim that both fridge samples we tested are faulty; we will be including another sample of each in a future test to verify their claims.

Hey big boy

It's not often our thermal labs can't accommodate a fridge, but when we bought the Samsung SRF801GDLS for our next test (keep an eye out for *CHOICE*, March 2012) we had to pay a Samsung preferred service company $260 to remove the fridge doors to get it in. If you're thinking about buying this model, take the size and this potential cost into account.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

A **chiller** is important for storing meat, fish and poultry (fresh or cooked) at a safe temperature for longer. Its temperature should be close to zero and ideally have a separate temperature control.

Crisper Look for a well-sealed crisper drawer to keep vegetables fresh. Check that the fridge's air outlets don't blow onto it, as this will dry food out faster. A good crisper means you won't have to put your fruit and veggies in plastic bags. A fridge with one crisper drawer is usually the full width of the fridge; two crispers are usually each half the width.

A **dairy compartment** keeps butter and hard cheeses slightly soft.

Fresh food shelves should be easy to remove and replace and the range of shelf positions should suit your needs. Can you stand soft drink or wine bottles in the door shelves? Split shelves can be handy for this.

Rollers are useful for moving the fridge and cleaning behind it easily. You should also look for adjustable feet (or rollers) for levelling the fridge. Four rollers are better than two, provided they have brakes or adjustable feet to secure the fridge in place.

Removable shelves Having all shelves removable when the door is at 90° is important for access and cleaning when the fridge has to be positioned with the door hinge next to a wall.

Door hinge position If you move house a lot, opt for one that's reversible (that is, it can be switched to swing from right to left or left to right), though you may have to buy a kit and/or call in a service person to install this.

WHAT TO BUY

Below are the best fridges in each size range, with a minimum score of 60% for all aspects of temperature performance except the recommended setting score. We exclude this because you can change the recommended setting to get a better result. Best Buys are top performers with a good reliability rating that are relatively cheap to buy and run. Where possible, we've included both top and bottom freezers in relevant size categories. There are still no fridges that meet these criteria in the smallest sizes. For profiles of the models in the What to Buy list, see the *CHOICE* issue indicated or go online to choice.com.au/fridges, where you can also find out how we test fridges.

300L-380L

NEW **Fisher & Paykel** E372B (B) $1329
Fisher & Paykel E381T Tasman (T) (May 06) $989
Westinghouse WBM3700WB (B) (May 09) $1269

381L-450L

Fisher & Paykel E442B Stainless (B) (Dec 10 / Jan 11) $1919
Fisher & Paykel E406B Elegance (B) (May 09) $1562 Best Buy

451L-525L

Fisher & Paykel E521T Elegance (T) (Nov 06) $1969
Westinghouse WBM5100WB (B) (Sept 09) $1899

MORE THAN 525L INCLUDING FRENCH DOOR

Haier HTD647AS (FD) (Apr 11) $1999
Fisher & Paykel RF610A (FD) (Nov 07) $3299
NEW **LG** GR-L219CSL (FD) $3499

SIDE-BY-SIDE

Westinghouse WSE6100WA (Nov 05) $2009

B Freezer on bottom. **T** Freezer on top.
FD French doors.

300L-380L

81%

Fisher & Paykel E372B

Good points

- Excellent range of temperatures available
- Very good response to seasonal change
- Very good energy score
- Excellent recommended setting

Bad points

- No chiller
- Difficult to remove shelves if door is only open to 90°

MORE THAN 525L

including French doors

74%

LG GR-L219CSL

Good points

- Very good score for fluctuations
- Very good recommended setting
- Chiller
- Water and ice dispenser

Bad points

- Range of available temperatures is a little restricted

Tester Corinna Horrigan notes fridge faults

RELIABILITY

Fridges are generally a reliable product. Fisher & Paykel consistently makes our What to Buy lists and is recommended above, while LG is also above average as a brand people have had few problems with in the past 12 months (see right). Fisher & Paykel is also among the brands our members say they are most likely to buy again. Our survey revealed up to 25% of problems with Fisher & Paykel relate to door seals, temperature control or icing up of food.

PERCENTAGE WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE 12 MONTHS PRIOR TO MAY 2010	(%)
Mitsubishi (76)	94
LG (884)	90
Kelvinator/Electrolux (685)	89
Fisher & Paykel (3622)	88
Westinghouse (2893)	88
Samsung (597)	83
Whirlpool (448)	83
Maytag (224)	72
GE (124)	68
All refrigerators (9553)	87

* The number in brackets is the number of responses received for that brand.

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		COSTS		PERFORMANCE									
		Price ($)	10-year running costs ($)	Overall score (%)	Freezer	Number of doors	Temperature performance score (%)	Fluctuation score (%)	Range score (%)	Uniformity score (%)	Ambient change score (%)	Recommended setting score (%)	Energy efficiency score (%)
<300L	**Westinghouse** WTB2500WB	739	887	70	Top	2	67	80	70	75	33	85	82
	Westinghouse WTB2300WB-XAU	689	887	67	Top	2	63	80	70	60	29	80	81
	LG GN-253VW	699	928	65	Top	2	61	45	70	70	58	80	81
	Whirlpool WRI21UW	699	818	61	Top	2	56	45	85	65	22	70	83
	Mitsubishi MR-C375B-ST-A	1250	1034	58	Bottom	3	52	40	45	50	81	65	79
	# Samsung SR216NME (A)	649	783	56	Top	2	49	30	65	65	74	60	84
SMALL (300L-380L)	**# Fisher & Paykel** E372B	1329	1096	81	Bottom	2	81	75	90	70	89	90	81
	Fisher & Paykel E381T	989	933	79	Top	2	77	60	80	85	90	80	85
	Westinghouse WBM3700WB	1269	1058	76	Bottom	2	74	65	90	75	67	70	82
	# Kelvinator KBM3800WB-R	1109	1155	70	Bottom	2	68	80	55	70	69	50	80
	Samsung SR364MW	949	955	70	Top	2	66	60	70	70	66	70	84
	# Westinghouse WBM3700SB-R	1639	1063	68	Bottom	2	65	55	78	65	64	65	82
MEDIUM (381L-450L)	**Fisher & Paykel** E442B	1919	1261	78	Bottom	2	78	60	90	85	81	85	79
	Fisher & Paykel E406B	1562	1230	76	Bottom	2	76	65	90	60	90	80	78
	Electrolux EBM4300SC	1959	869	75	Bottom	2	72	70	90	55	69	75	88
	Fisher & Paykel E440T	2129	1087	74	Top	2	72	50	85	80	77	85	83
	Samsung SR432NW	999	1054	74	Top	2	72	65	80	75	77	50	84
	Fisher & Paykel E402B	1639	1234	73	Bottom	2	72	60	85	65	80	80	78
	Electrolux ETM4407SC	2589	777	72	Top	2	68	75	90	65	33	70	90
	Kelvinator KTM4400WB	1219	1021	72	Top	2	69	65	90	70	45	80	84
	Westinghouse WBM4300WB	1529	1164	72	Bottom	2	70	75	85	55	66	50	81
	# Mitsubishi MR-BF390B-W-A (A)	1067	1146	56	Bottom	2	50	30	60	60	85	70	80
LARGE (451L-525L)	**Fisher & Paykel** E521T	1969	1091	78	Top	2	76	60	85	85	77	80	85
	Westinghouse WBM5100WB	1899	1157	76	Bottom	2	74	75	85	70	65	55	84
	Electrolux EBM5100SC	2379	882	74	Bottom	2	70	70	80	65	62	80	89
	Electrolux EBM5107SC	2849	928	74	Bottom	2	71	70	75	65	70	70	88
	Kelvinator KBM5100MB	1799	1305	74	Bottom	2	72	80	70	80	57	60	81
	# Westinghouse WTM5200WB	1689	1175	74	Top	2	72	75	87	75	53	40	83
	Bosch KGN53X70AU/08	1899	1078	73	Bottom	2	70	80	75	70	53	60	83
	Fisher & Paykel E522BRXFDU	2509	1379	72	Bottom	2	70	55	85	70	77	50	79
	Fisher & Paykel E522B	2029	1412	71	Bottom	2	69	60	80	50	87	80	78
> 525L & FD	**Haier** HTD647AS	1999	1536	79	Bottom	3	79	90	75	80	65	90	80
	Fisher & Paykel RF610A	3299	1514	78	Bottom	3	78	70	80	80	83	85	79
	# LG GR-L219CSL	3499	1489	74	Bottom	4	73	80	70	70	64	85	79
	Electrolux EQE6007SB-NAU	3699	1454	70	Bottom	4	67	40	85	90	85	70	84
SIDE BY SIDE	**Westinghouse** WSE6100WA	2009	1551	77	Left	2	76	75	80	60	90	75	79
	LG GC-L197STF	2199	1155	75	Left	2	74	70	80	70	76	70	81
	Daewoo FRS-U20ICW	1499	1463	74	Left	2	72	60	80	75	74	90	81
	# Kelvinator KSM6100WB	1689	1520	70	Left	2	67	70	85	65	38	80	80
	Haier HSBS562IS	1599	1703	69	Left	2	69	85	50	60	88	35	70
	# Samsung SRS585HDIS	2199	1529	68	Left	2	65	55	90	40	85	25	78
	# Westinghouse WSE 7000SA (A)	2749	1652	68	Left	2	65	70	85	35	68	50	80

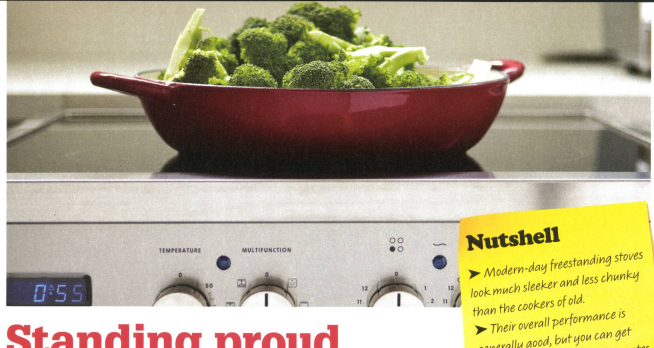
		FEATURES						SPECIFICATIONS						
/ year)	Noise level (dB)	Chiller	Crisper drawer	Dairy compartment	Fresh food shelves / shelf positions	Rollers	All shelves removable at 90°	Door hinge position	Dimensions (mm, H x W x D)	Claimed total volume (L)	Claimed volume, fresh food (L)	Claimed volume, freezer (L)	Contact
03	33	✓	1	✓	2/7		✓	Rev	1491 x 542 x 620	246	167	79	westinghouse.com.au
03	39	✓	1	✓	3/7			Rev	1389 x 542 x 620	230	161	65	westinghouse.com.au
22	47	✓	1		2/4			R	1605 x 537 x 604	253	179	74	lge.com.au
72	42	✓	1		2/3	✓	✓	Rev	1450 x 560 x 670	212	149	63	whirlpool.com.au
70	30	✓	1		2/3	✓	✓	R	1678 x 600 x 656	276	272	103	mitsubishielectric.com.au
56	38	✓	1		2/4		✓	R	1442 x 552 x 586	216	148	68	samsung.com.au
98	30		2	✓	2/13	✓	✓	R or L	1595 x 635 x 736	373	250	123	fp.com.au
24	35		1	✓	3/18	✓	✓	Rev	1595 x 635 x 712	380	283	97	fp.com.au
81	38		1	✓	2/7	✓		R or L	1620 x 652 x 709	365	243	122	westinghouse.com.au
25	37		1	✓	2/10	✓		R	1720 x 703 x 641	380	267	114	kelvinator.com.au
34	39	✓	1		2/5			R	1687 x 670 x 660	365	245	120	samsung.com.au
83	34		1	✓	2/7	✓	✓	R	1620 x 652 x 709	370	243	122	westinghouse.com.au
73	30		2	✓	3/17	✓		R	1695 x 680 x 730	442	307	135	fp.com.au
59	30		2	✓	3/13	✓		R or L	1595 x 680 x 736	404	271	133	fp.com.au
95	33	✓	1	✓	2/8	✓		R or L	1720 x 703 x 709	430	300	131	electrolux.com.au
94	30		1	✓	3/20	✓		R or L	1695 x 680 x 734	447	342	105	fp.com.au
79	36		1		3/4	✓	✓	R	1701 x 725 x 717	434	301	133	samsung.com.au
61	35		2	✓	3/10	✓		R or L	1695 x 635 x 730	403	280	123	fp.com.au
53	37		1	✓	3/17	✓		R or L	1720 x 700 x 745	442	339	103	electrolux.com.au
64	41		1	✓	3/10	✓		R or L	1720 x 703 x 703	431	300	131	kelvinator.com.au
29	37		1	✓	3/10	✓		R or L	1720 x 703 x 709	431	300	131	westinghouse.com.au
06	31		1		4/7	✓	✓	R	1720 x 600 x 656	390	285	105	mitsubishielectric.com.au
96	35		1	✓	3/20	✓		R or L	1695 x 790 x 734	517	400	117	fp.com.au
26	39		2	✓	3/20	✓		R or L	1720 x 803 x 709	504	348	156	westinghouse.com.au
01	34		2	✓	2/8	✓	✓	R or L	1720 x 803 x 745	510	349	156	electrolux.com.au
22	32	✓	2	✓	2/8	✓		R	1702 x 790 x 612	505	349	156	electrolux.com.au
93	38		2	✓	2/10	✓	✓	R or L	1720 x 803 x 703	505	349	156	kelvinator.com.au
34	35	✓	2	✓	3/12	✓	✓	R	1720 x 803 x 709	520	396	122	westinghouse.com.au
90	37	✓	2		3/4	✓		Rev	1700 x 700 x 750	451	332	119	bosch-home.com.au
27	34		2	✓	3/17	✓	✓	R	1700 x 790 x 736	519	360	159	fp.com.au
42	37		2	✓	3/17	✓	✓	R or L	1700 x 790 x 736	519	360	159	fp.com.au
98	38	✓	2	✓	4/15 (C)	✓	✓	na	1770 x 910 x 710	647	423	211	haierappliances.com.au
88	37		2	✓	2/14	✓		na	1780 x 900 x 730	614	433	181	fp.com.au
77	35	✓	2	✓	2/14	✓	✓	na	1771 x 908 x 763	610	402	196	lge.com.au
61	34	✓	2	✓	2/4	✓	✓	na	1720 x 890 x 818	602	370	232	electrolux.com.au
05	41		2	✓	3/12	✓		na	1754 x 898 x 741	606	357	249	westinghouse.com.au
45	33		2	✓	3/9	✓		na	1758 x 894 x 690	567	353	214	lge.com.au
65	38	(B)	2	✓	3/6	✓		na	1790 x 895 x 730	618	377	241	daewooelectronics.com.au
01	38		1	✓	4/12	✓		na	1754 x 898 x 741	606	357	249	kelvinator.com.au
71	39		1	✓	3/9	✓	✓	na	1768 x 890 x 770	560	348	212	haierappliances.com.au
95	35		1	✓	3/9	✓		na	1789 x 912 x 721	585	364	221	samsung.com.au
51	40	✓	1	✓	3/9	✓		na	1754 x 1000 x 741	700	450	250	westinghouse.com.au

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score consists of: Temperature performance: 80%; Energy efficiency: 20%. **Temperature performance** This score consists of: Fluctuations: 30%; Range: 25%; Uniformity: 20%; Ambient change: 20%; Recommended setting: 5%. **Features** see What to Look For, page 54. **Energy efficiency** is based on the fridge's energy consumption, taking into account its size. **Noise level** These are comparative measurements taken 1m up and 1m away from the fridge during normal running. Fridges can sound noticeably louder as the compressor starts and stops and may make unusual noises during automatic defrosting. **Claimed volumes** This is how much air space the fridge has to cool; less space is available for storage. Use the volumes to get an idea of how big the freezer is compared with the fresh-food compartment. **10-year running costs** are calculated at a rate of 22c/kWh. A 10-year period gives a useful indication of the long-term differences between high and low energy use – and you should be able to expect your fridge to last at least this long. **Price** Recommended retail, as of November 2011. Many fridges are available in other styles and finishes, at a different price. Some can also be built into cabinets with a door kit that matches your kitchen cupboards.

TABLE NOTES

Newly tested model. **na** Not applicable – doors are side-by-side. **Rev** Reversible door. **(A)** Discontinued, but may still be available in stores. **(B)** This chiller was too warm in our tests for optimal storage of highly perishable foods. **(C)** Four half-width shelves.



Nutshell

- Modern-day freestanding stoves look much sleeker and less chunky than the cookers of old.
- Their overall performance is generally good, but you can get better performance with separates.

Standing proud

Martha Psiroukis finds out how modern freestanding cookers shape up.

A separate cooktop and oven give you maximum flexibility in your kitchen layout, with the option to mix and match any style of cooktop with a built-in oven positioned at the right height. But if you want to replace your existing stove without reconfiguring your kitchen, there are some neat, modern-looking cookers on offer.

Unlike the old-fashioned chunky stoves with high-back control panels, these smaller, stainless steel versions look sleek and streamlined. Their controls are at the front so your splashback can run across the whole back wall, though this can be a problem with an added cost if you're replacing a high-back version. Controls that are easily accessible at the front are also risky if you have young children.

This type (and size) of stove is not a big seller according to market figures and your requests – most of you are looking for information on separate units or the larger dual fuel ranges, which we reported on in *CHOICE* November 2011, page 46. But to give you an indication of what you get for your money, we ran four popular models through their paces. While their oven and cooktop performance is good or very good, they're not as easy to use or to clean as separate units. You can get better performance and self-cleaning options with built-in ovens, and better-performing ceramic cooktops – possibly at a lower cost. They're also smaller internally than a standard oven, with more crevices where grime can gather. Disappointingly, three failed the shelf tilt test, so watch out when you're pulling shelves out loaded with hot food. ■

How we test

See *CHOICE* November 2011, page 48, or go to choice.com.au/smallstoves

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	COSTS		PERFORMANCE					FEATURES										SPECIFICATIONS
	Price ($)	Oven running cost ($ / 10 years)	Overall score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Cooktop score (%)	Oven score (%)	Grill score (%)	Top and bottom element	Fan forced	Fan assist	Bottom element plus fan	Top element only	Full grill	Fan grilling	Telescopic runners	Self-cleaning liners	Residual heat indicator	Claimed element ratings (kW)
Blanco BFS60CX	2399	167	78	70	81	88	78	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	1.2 x 2; 1.8; 2.1 / 0.7 (C)
DeLonghi DE60E	2749	191	75	62	81	86	80	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓(B)	✓		1.2 x 2; 1.8; 2.1 / 0.7 (C)
Omega OF602XA	1999	257	74	63	76	89	73	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓			✓	ns
Euromaid SC600	1499	214	70	63	78	79	55	✓		✓	✓	(A)	✓	✓		✓	✓	1.2 x 2; 1.7 x 2

USING THE TABLE **Scores** The overall score is made up of: Ease of use: 40%; Cooktop: 25%; Oven: 25% and Grill: 10%. **Features** See What to Look For, far right. For details on which functions are worthwhi see What to Look For at choice.com.au/smallstoves. No model on test has a half grill or smokeless grill tray. **External dimensions** These are measured dimensions for the smallest box that will fit around the appliance. **Measured internal volume** is calculated from measurements of the deepest shelf/baking tray in the lowest position to the grill element, side wall to side wall, and the rear wall to the door. See Inte Space, far right, for more. **Running costs** are based on using the oven on the fan-forced function (or fan-assist if there isn't one) at 150°C above room temperature (about 170°C) for one hour, three times per we

WHAT TO BUY

78%
Blanco BFS60CX

Good points

- Good oven viewing window
- Has a good element layout with a dual element option
- Grill tray does not tilt down when pulled out, and has stoppers to prevent it from being pulled right out
- The cooktop is very easy to clean
- Passes the shelf tilt test

Bad points

- No self-cleaning functions
- Controls easily accessed by children
- Shelves do not slide out far enough to manipulate food at the back
- Grill element does not drop down to clean the oven ceiling and has no shield to protect hands
- Small chips of enamel flaked off the oven floor

	Internal dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Contact
60 x 65	31 x 42 x 40	hagemeyerappliances.com.au
60 x 61	27.5 x 44 x 42	delonghi.com.au
60 x 64	31 x 45 x 43	hagemeyerappliances.com.au
60 x 60	31 x 46 x 43	euromaid.com.au

ove room temperature (about 170°C overall) for one hour, three times per for 10 years at 22c/kWh. **Price** RRP, as of October 2011. **TABLE NOTES** t stated. **(A)** Top element plus fan. **(B)** For one shelf only and can only be ed on one of the two middle shelf positions. **(C)** Dual element rating.

ABOUT THE REST

The **DeLonghi** comes with catalytic liners, one set of telescopic runners, fingerprint-resistant stainless steel and a pizza stone. But its cooktop simmer performance and ease of use are only OK. Its largest element is at the back, the grill element has no shield to prevent accidental burns, and it fails the shelf tilt test, so food may slide off the shelves when they're pulled out.

The **Omega** has moulded side runners that are easy to clean, a dual element and pizza mode. But it's only OK for ease of use and cooktop simmering, the grill element has no shield to prevent accidental burns, and it fails the shelf tilt test.

The **Euromaid** comes with catalytic liners on the side walls but has no fan-forced mode, and its stainless-steel exterior needs extra attention to keep clean. It's only OK for ease of use, grilling, fan grilling, low-temperature oven baking, cooktop simmering and turn-down ability. The grill element has no shield to prevent accidental burns, and it fails the shelf tilt test.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Labels that are etched (as opposed to bonded) on stainless steel surfaces so they don't come off over time or after cleaning. Bonded labels sit on the surface, etched are in the surface – you can feel the difference with your fingertip.

Element ratings and layout Configurations that are spaced so you don't have to reach over one element to get to another are generally easier to use. Simmer elements should be at the front. CHOICE has found that element ratings don't correlate with cooking performance results, so don't base your buying decision on the ratings – check our cooking scores for this at choice.com.au/smallstoves.

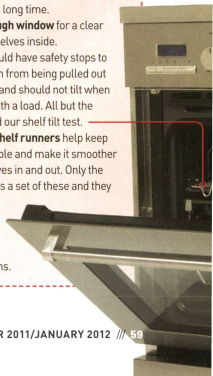
Internal space Rather than going by the cooker's stated capacity, take your largest baking dish with you to the store. Many manufacturers use an international standard to measure usable capacity, but differing interpretations mean claimed usable volumes between manufacturers are inconsistent. For this test, we measure from the deepest shelf or tray in lowest shelf position to the grill element, side wall to side wall (at the narrowest point to fit the widest possible tray), and the rear wall to the door. In many cases you can slide a wide dish in between the shelf supports. Using the oven floor is not recommended in these ovens except the Blanco, which makes no recommendations in its manual. Blanco's manufacturer tells us you can use the oven floor, but we advise against it as it can damage the enamel.

Catalytic liners (or self-cleaning surfaces) work by absorbing fat splatters. For the liners to work well, you need to regularly heat the oven to 250°C for an hour to burn off the splatters and, when cool, wipe them with a damp cloth. Properly cared for, they should last a long time.

A **large enough window** for a clear view of all shelves inside.

Shelves should have safety stops to prevent them from being pulled out accidentally and should not tilt when pulled out with a load. All but the Blanco failed our shelf tilt test.

Telescopic shelf runners help keep the shelf stable and make it smoother to slide shelves in and out. Only the DeLonghi has a set of these and they can only be installed in one of the two middle shelf positions.



Peace keepers

These gates are vital for your toddler's safety and your peace of mind, says **Chris Barnes**.

With a curious toddler in the home it's essential to make rooms as child-safe as possible. It's not just the stairs you have to worry about – the kitchen, laundry and garage can all contain hazards. Safety gates and barriers are vital for keeping children out of harm's way. We tested 13 safety gates and one barrier, priced from $20-$199.

There's no Australian standard for safety gates, so we base our tests on suitable clauses in the standards for cots, portable cots and toys. We look for potential hazards such as gaps that might trap fingers, limbs or heads; sharp edges or points; climbing footholds; detachable parts that could be a choking hazard; and the gate's strength and its attachment to the doorway. Many manufacturers test their gates against the European or American standards, which have different requirements. Models that meet these but fail our tests aren't unsafe, but we believe the recommended models are the best choice. ■

Nutshell

- We found a variety of hazards, including climbing footholds and gaps that could trap limbs.
- Some gates could even be pulled free from a doorway by a determined child.

WHAT TO BUY

The newly tested models below are recommended – they pass all our safety tests. From our previous test, recommended models still available are the Lindam Sure Shut Orto Safety Gate, Love N Care Advanced Auto-Close Gate and Kiddy Cots Door Barrier DB-1.

Mothercare Swing Shut Safety Gate

Good points

- Passed all our safety requirements and tests
- Automatic closing and locking

Bad points

- Opens in only one direction

Target Deluxe Safety Gate

Good points

- Passed all our safety requirements and tests
- Automatic closing and locking
- Includes two 10cm extension pieces

Bad points

- None to mention

Love N Care Child & Pet Gate

Good points

- Passed all our safety requirements and tests

Bad points

- Swings open in only one direction
- Very difficult to fully tighten the clamps due to the notches on them

About the rest

Of the models listed below as worth considering (only minor failures), the **Summer** has some potential finger traps, the **Dreambaby** has some laminated labels that could be eaten or inhaled, and the **Love N Care** only passes the horizontal strength test (which tests if a gate could open if a child pushes or pulls hard on it) if you use the supplied wall-mount cups.

For the full test results, as well as details of how we test, go to **choice.com.au/safetygates**

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Gates are convenient if you need frequent access to the closed-off area, while **barriers** must be stepped over.

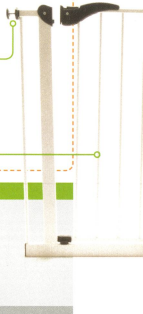
Wall cups for stronger mounting are recommended for riskier areas.

Latches that close with an audible or visible indicator so you know the gate is shut, and need two separate actions to operate (e.g. unlock and lift) but can still be used with one hand.

Adjustable width to fit a range of doorways; some gates have extension kits included.

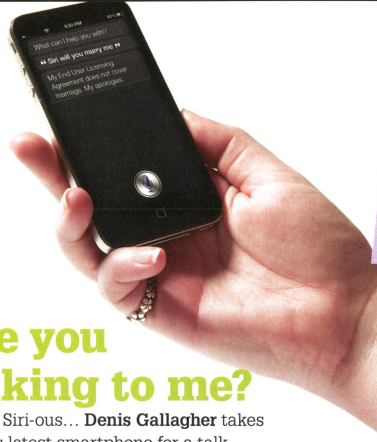
No footholds for climbing.

Gaps between bars should be between 50mm- 95mm, or between 12mm-30mm or less than 5mm.



	PERFORMANCE			SPECIFICATIONS					
	Price ($)	Ease of use score (%)	Passed all our safety requirements and tests	Type	Stated width range without extensions (cm)	Opening direction	Weight (kg) *	Height (cm)**	Contact
RECOMMENDED									
Lindam Sure Shut Orto Safety Gate LD147	80	75	✓	Gate	75-82	2	4.9	76	02 9905 0666
# Mothercare Swing Shut Safety Gate K2999	119	75	✓	Gate	74-80	1	4.6	79	mothercare.com
# Target Deluxe Safety Gate 44743581	79	70	✓	Gate	73-82	2	4.3	77	target.com.au
Love N Care Advanced Auto-Close Gate	109	70	✓	Gate	75-82	1	5.5	78	lovencare.com.au
# Love N Care Child & Pet Gate BP3920 PETS/ELC	115	60	✓	Gate	75-83	1	5.5	104	lovencare.com.au
Kiddy Cots Door Barrier DB-1	45	40	✓	Barrier	62-104	na	1.8	66	kiddycots.com.au
WORTH CONSIDERING									
Summer Extra Tall Walk-Thru Gate 07060C	115	75	✓(A)	Gate	71-82	2	4.9	92	rogerarmstrong.com.au
Dreambaby Extra-Tall Swing Closed Security Gate F190W	120	70	✓(A)	Gate	71-82	2	5.3	103	dreambaby.com.au
# Love N Care Easyfit Gate BP3910 EFS/ELC	89	60	✓(A)	Gate	75-83	1	4.4	77	lovencare.com.au
NOT RECOMMENDED									
The First Years Hands Free Gate Y3600	100	80		Gate	74-85	2	5.4	82	learningcurve.com
# North States Clear Choice Gate 4601	20	75		Barrier	66-106	na	1.6	59	northstatesind.com
Infa-Secure Protecta Door Barrier 320	85	70		Gate	77-82	2	4.1	76	infa-secure.com.au
Safety 1st Quick Close Gate 35015720	80	70		Gate	73-81	2	4.4	80	ingoodcare.com.au
Valco Guardian Swing Back Gate N81321	89	70		Gate	73-81	2	5.0	93	valco.com.au
# Dreambaby Swing Closed Security Gate F160W	100	70		Gate	71-82	2	4.3	76	dreambaby.com.au
# Lindam Numi Aluminium 44435	199	70		Gate	66-101	2	5.0	73	target.com.au
# Summer Sure & Secure Custom Fit Gate 07160A	169	70		Gate	178-226	2	7.0	79	summerinfant.com
# The First Years Extra Tall and Wide Y7190	129	70		Gate	71-79	2	5.0	92	learningcurve.com
# Baby Solutions Metal Safety Gate Double Lock USSG03	59	65		Gate	75-84	2	4.4	79	kmart.com.au
# Dreambaby Timber Swing Gate F826	50	65		Gate	76-122	2	2.6	82	dreambaby.com.au
# Safety 1st Alarm Security Gate 42250	129	65		Gate	74-107	1	6.3	76	safety1st.com
# Valco Swing Back Gate SG03-21	90	70		Gate	73-85	1	4.3	77	valco.com.au
Dreambaby Retractable Gate F820	120	55		Gate	Up to 140	(B)	1.6	89	tee-zed.com.au
# Infa-Secure SECURE 350 Scenic	100	55		Gate	73-85	1	5.8	77	infa-secure.com.au
Evenflo Soft and Wide Gate 526335	90	30		Barrier	97-152	na	2.8	70	rogerarmstrong.com.au

TABLE NOTES # Newly tested model. na Not applicable. * Including supplied accessories, rounded to the nearest 0.1 kg. ** Rounded up to the next cm, including all protruding parts. (A) Minor failure. (B) Retractable. USING THE TABLE Recommended models pass all our safety requirements and tests. Worth considering models have only minor failures (see About the Rest). Not recommended models fail at least one major safety test, such as limb entrapment hazards, climbing footholds or horizontal strength.



Nutshell

- It's still early days, but you may find yourself talking to your phone more than your friends.
- Competition for domination of the smartphone market has never been more intense.

Are you talking to me?

This is Siri-ous… **Denis Gallagher** takes Apple's latest smartphone for a talk.

CHOICE used to advise that important things to consider when choosing a smartphone included its operating system, networking features and reception – but now, thanks to Apple's new Siri app, you also have to consider whether or not you want your phone to give you any backchat.

Siri is an artificial intelligence (AI) agent available on Apple's iPhone 4S that not only recognises voice commands, but also understands context and responds to conversational language. To obtain a weather report, for example, you might ask, "Will I need my umbrella today?"

You can also dictate text messages and emails, set alarms and reminders, schedule meetings and search for information. Siri will search the web for you, using the search engine of your choice, giving you the correct answers to questions such as, "How many kilos in 4.75 tons?"

When it comes to other smartphones, Google Android already has its voice search feature enabled in Australia, but not the more Siri-like functions available in the US. And Microsoft has brought voice commands to Windows Phone 7.5, allowing you to open programs, create messages and search by voice.

And the winner is...

The Galaxy S II scores well across most of our performance categories to earn top honours, with many connectivity options to surf the web using your phone network or your wireless home network. The Apple iPhone 4S would have scored better overall if it didn't deliver such poor battery performance results, lasting only eight days in standby mode – significantly less than the previous iPhone 4. Apple has acknowledged that this low battery performance is a bug with the latest iOS 5 software and issued an update, but our testing shows it's still below the other top performers.

What about Nokia?

Nokia is hoping to halt its dramatic slide in market share by announcing plans to abandon the Symbian OS in favour of Windows Phone 7. The first Nokia Windows mobiles are expected to arrive in Australia early 2012.

		PERFORMANCE
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)
Samsung Galaxy S II	899	79
Apple iPhone 4S	799	77
HTC EVO 3D	999	76
LG P920 Optimus 3D	799	76
HTC Sensation	799	75
HTC Desire S	699	74
Sony Ericsson Xperia Neo	299	73
LG P970 Optimus Black	549	71
Motorola Atrix	799	71
Nokia X7-00	549	71
HTC Salsa	579	70
Motorola Pro	799	68
Sony Ericsson Xperia Mini Pro	259	68
BlackBerry Bold 9900	999	67
HTC Wildfire S	399	67
Nokia E6-00	629	65
Samsung Galaxy Gio S5660	349	65
Sony Ericsson Xperia Mini	229	65
HTC ChaCha	549	64
Samsung S5570 Galaxy Mini	279	62
LG P350 Optimus Me	329	59
Huawei Ideos X3 U8510	99	53

USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up: Internet: 15%; quality: 10.5%; Email: 10%; Camera: 10%; Music: 10%; Video: 5%; Recepti Handling: 5%; Touchscreen: 5%; Battery 5%; SMS: 4.5%; GPS 5%; PC Syn

WHAT TO BUY

79%

Samsung Galaxy S II

Good points

- Good web-browsing performance
- Excellent display
- Can capture HD video
- Excellent email performance
- Best out-of-box GPS performance

Bad points

- Reception performance not as good as some of the other models on test

$899

77%

Apple iPhone 4S

Good points

- Good web-browsing performance
- Good call-sound quality
- Can capture HD video
- Excellent email performance

Bad points

- No memory card support
- No FM radio unless using online app
- Poor standby battery performance

$799

											FEATURES										SPECIFICATIONS						
Battery score (%)	Music score (%)	Video score (%)	Reception score (%)	Handling score (%)	Touchscreen score (%)	Battery score (%)	SMS score (%)	GPS score (%)	Synchronisation score (%)	Display score (%)	Durability score (%)	QWERTY keyboard	Tethering	Wi-Fi (n)	Front-facing camera	HD video capture	Memory card slot (micro SD)	LED flash	Autofocus	FM radio	Internal memory (GB)	Camera resolution (megapixels)	Specific absorption rate (SAR, W/kg)	Operating system	Display size (inches)	Weight (g)	Contact
71	77	65	56	82	92	79	82	77	82	90	78		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	16	8	0.34	Android 2.3.3	4.3	116	samsung.com.au
89	76	89	62	77	87	47	88	72	72	91	87		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		14	8	0.98	iOS 5.0.1	3.5	140	apple.com.au
79	79	57	67	87	92	58	83	71	82	83	76		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1	5	1.05	Android 2.3.4	4.3	169	htc.com/au
71	71	69	52	76	92	83	80	66	82	88	83		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		8	5	0.56	Android 2.2.2	4.3	169	lge.com.au
77	63	44	88	92	79	82	71	82	86	70		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.8	8	0.76	Android 2.3.3	4.3	150	htc.com/au
77	52	46	86	84	67	77	68	82	77	65		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.8	5	0.79	Android 2.3.3	3.7	131	htc.com/au
74	62	62	64	84	69	68	69	82	82	75		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.32	8	1.10	Android 2.3.2	3.7	128	sonyericsson.com.au
67	51	44	77	84	76	70	72	82	91	75				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1	5	1.43	Android 2.2.2	4.0	113	lge.com.au
75	54	40	71	60	75	73	74	88	89	73				✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		16	5	0.92	Android 2.2.2	4.0	136	motorola.com.au
82	73	71	66	84	82	79	70	58	74	71		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.35	8	0.94	Symbian 3	4.1	148	nokia.com.au
74	40	58	82	84	73	74	70	82	67	70		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.5	5	1.23	Android 2.3.3	3.4	119	htc.com/au
72	52	54	66	55	72	64	74	88	67	80	✓			✓			✓	✓	✓		2	5	0.69	Android 2.2.2	3.1	143	motorola.com.au
70	61	68	67	76	73	68	59	82	60	79	✓	✓	b/g	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.32	5	0.46	Android 2.3.3	3.0	137	sonyericsson.com.au
72	67	56	69	79	61	77	49	76	80	64	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓				8	5	1.19	BlackBerry 7	2.8	131	au.blackberry.com
71	51	35	76	84	73	68	66	82	64	70		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.5	5	1.21	Android 2.3.3	3.2	106	htc.com/au
68	64	80	60	84	91	59	60	58	80	82	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	8	8	0.56	Symbian 3	2.5	134	nokia.com.au
64	49	69	68	71	81	61	67	70	69	66			✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	0.15	3.2	0.79	Android 2.2.1	3.2	102	samsung.com.au
70	61	69	62	76	68	54	61	82	59	72		✓	b/g		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.32	5	0.78	Android 2.3.3	3.0	102	sonyericsson.com.au
65	50	46	76	71	69	70	52	82	69	72	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	0.5	5	0.94	Android 2.3.3	2.6	126	htc.com/au
62	41	61	61	71	80	68	56	70	56	66			✓	✓			✓			✓	0.16	3.2	0.61	Android 2.2.1	3.1	107	samsung.com.au
67	41	69	57	60	77	49	53	82	56	69			✓	b/g			✓		✓	✓	0.16	3	1.46	Android 2.2	2.9	110	lge.com.au
62	32	59	65	42	59	50	47	82	49	54			✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	0.5	3	0.50	Android 2.3.3	3.1	103	huawei.com.au

2.5%; Durability: 2.5%. **Price** Recommended retail, as of November 2011. You can get most of these phones for a lot less by shopping around. **TABLE NOTES** All phones on test have a 3.5mm headset socket; USB PC tion that can also charge the phone; a single display; and quad band GSM support as well as support for the 2100MHz 3G band; hands-free talk mode and a capacitive touchscreen. All support the faster wireless 802.11n d except the Sony Ericsson Xperia Mini, Mini Pro and LG P350 Optimus Me, which support the slower 802.11b and 802.11g standards.

76%
HTC EVO 3D

Good points
- Good web-browsing performance
- Very good call-sound quality
- Best reception among the top-performing models
- Can capture 3D HD video using two lenses

Bad points
- Video performance quality overall is only OK
- Only OK overall battery performance

76%
LG P920 Optimus 3D

Good points
- Good web-browsing performance
- Best overall call-sound quality on test
- Can capture 3D HD video using two lenses
- Excellent email performance

Bad points
- No FM radio unless using online app

75%
HTC Sensation

Good points
- Good web-browsing performance
- Can capture HD video
- Very good for general handling of the phone
- Excellent email performance

Bad points
- Reception performance not as good as some of the other models on test

74%
HTC Desire S

Good points
- Good web-browsing performance
- Can capture HD video
- Very good for general handling of the phone
- Excellent email performance

Bad points
- Reception performance is not as good as some of the models on test
- Video performance is only OK

73%
Sony Ericsson Xperia Neo

Good points
- Good web-browsing performance
- Very good call sound quality
- Can capture HD video

Bad points
- Smallest internal memory of the top-performing models
- General handling not as good as top-performing models

Tethering is a feature that allows you to use your smartphone as an internet modem, allowing other devices you own such as a laptop or tablet computer to access the web. Connectivity can be established through a physical USB connection or wirelessly through Bluetooth.

Smart-priced smartphones

For less than $300 the Sony Ericsson Xperia Neo is an affordable option, with very good overall sound quality and touchscreen display. It also performs very well for email and syncing with a computer. If you're on a budget and aren't worried about the camera or video quality, you might consider the Samsung Galaxy Mini as a backup phone for yourself or someone else in the family. And while it doesn't score well, the Huawei Ideos X3 U8510 is just $99.

The great techno trick

Will LED screens or 3D really improve your life as much as you're being told? **Chris Ruggles** finds out.

New technologies are another tool for marketers to convince us we need a new TV. Calling LCD screens LED TVs is a good example of this. Light-emitting diodes (LEDs) are just the backlight for an LCD TV, but the implication from the advertising hype is that you're not keeping up if you have a boring old LCD with a compact fluorescent back light.

However, our top-performing Sony KDL40CX520 in the medium TV range has a compact fluorescent back light and costs significantly less than many others of that size. LEDs do have the potential to help produce very good pictures, but the fact that a TV has them is no guarantee of good performance.

To some extent, the same can be said for high definition (HD) claims. Most people never sit close enough to an 80cm TV to take advantage of the extra detail. Lower-resolution screens can not only look just as good but also cost less. As the screens get bigger, so do the pixels that make them up, and given most people sit two to three metres away from the TV, HD starts to make a difference in the bigger sizes because you don't want to see the pixels. However, the 127cm Panasonic TH-P50X30A plasma screen can deliver OK performance from its 1024 x 768 pixels at a very competitive price, provided you don't sit too close.

Another reason not to get too excited about having lots of pixels is that most broadcast TV in Australia is in standard definition (roughly equivalent to DVD quality), which means the TV has to up-scale the signal to its native resolution, which requires processing power that the TV may not be up to. Even with Blu-ray, the highest-quality input currently available, some TVs struggle with the information and deliver jittery HD pictures.

Nutshell

- LED backlighting and 3D are more common, but shouldn't be major purchase criteria.
- You need to consider the brightness and size of a room when deciding which TV to buy.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Input connections Check those on the TV match the output on the devices you want to hook up to it, such as a DVD player/recorder or games console, and that there are enough connections for all the devices you want to attach at the same time.

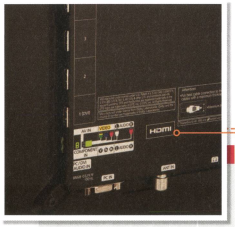
Network connectivity on the TV is becoming more important with the increasing popularity of broadband internet access that allows you to download and watch HD video on your TV.

Digital Living Network Alliance (DLNA) is a new standard for networking electronic devices designed to make it easier for you to enjoy downloaded video, photos and music on your consumer electronics products such as TVs, DVRs, Blu-ray and DVD players.

HDMI (high-definition multimedia interface) is a digital connection for sound and video in one cable. The latest DVD, Blu-ray and HD set-top boxes should have one.

Screen resolution Higher numbers mean more pixels and so more detail. 1920 x 1080 is the highest resolution and is often referred to as 1080p. The p stands for "progressive scanning", where the whole picture is shown at once as a complete video frame.

Audio outputs are usually at the back of the TV and allow you to connect your TV directly to a home theatre system.



Small TVs (mainly 80cm)

In April 2011, when we last reported on this size TV, LED backlighting was uncommon; now, most of this batch are using it. Some even have a recording function (DVR), which could come in handy if you have your TV in a kitchen or other area where you're easily distracted. Unfortunately, like the bigger sets with this function, DVR performance is often disappointing or only OK at best, and you'll need to supply a USB storage device.

TVs of this size are best suited to smaller rooms where you won't be sitting too far from the screen. Sound quality is particularly important if you're not going to hook them up with a home theatre system. In the batch on test, the sound varies from OK for the Panasonic TH-L32DT30A to poor for the Toshiba 32HL800A. Poor scores indicate you're likely to have trouble hearing voices clearly and can forget about enjoying music.

		PERFORMANCE									SPECIFICATIONS			
SMALL TVs	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Broadcast TV viewing score (%)	DVD viewing score (%)	Blu-ray viewing score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Sound quality score (%)	Energy score (%)	Viewing angle score (%)	DVR score (%)*	Screen size (cm)	Screen resolution (pixels)	Backlighting type	3D-capable
Panasonic TH-L32DT30A (WTB)	1399	71	68	73	75	66	68	75	80	68	80	1920 x 1080	LED	✓
Samsung UA32D6000 (WTB)	1099	71	81	73	74	67	59	80	40	na	80	1920 x 1080	LED	✓
Samsung UA37D5000 (WTB)	1099	70	79	70	69	67	59	80	50	na	94	1920 x 1080	LED	
Sony KDL32CX520 (WTB)	799	70	79	65	79	63	58	73	75	na	80	1920 x 1080	FL	
Sony KDL32EX420 (WTB)	849	70	74	69	74	64	61	80	75	na	80	1366 x 768	LED	
Samsung UA32D5000	899	68	74	61	63	67	65	80	75	na	80	1920 x 1080	LED	
Sony KDL32BX320	649	67	76	52	74	63	64	73	75	na	80	1366 x 768	FL	
Sony KDL32EX720	1299	63	61	62	64	64	66	75	55	na	80	1920 x 1080	LED	✓
Panasonic TH-L32X30A	699	59	57	44	54	64	64	85	80	na	80	1366 x 768	LED	
Toshiba 32HL800A	529	58	67	47	64	59	28	80	70	na	80	1920 x 1080	LED	
Prima LED3211HD	497	53	49	56	47	51	51	78	55	49	80	1366 x 768	LED	
TEAC LCD3281HD	599	52	47	52	58	53	51	68	50	na	80	1366 x 768	FL	
Kogan KGNFHDLEDH32VAA	539	49	52	43	44	56	49	68	20	53	80	1920 x 1080	LED	
Sanyo LED32XR10FH	999	46	43	39	47	58	37	68	30	na	80	1920 x 1080	LED	
Hisense HL32K16L	599	44	36	44	38	50	48	85	20	na	80	1366 x 768	LED	

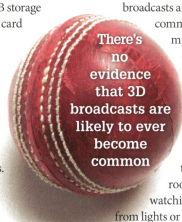
TABLE NOTES Price Recommended retail, as of October 2011. **Scores** The overall score is made up of: Broadcast TV viewing: 25%; Ease of use: 20%; DVD viewing: 20%; Blu-ray viewing: 15%; Sound quality: 10%; Energy: 5%; Viewing angle: 5%. * Not included in the overall score. **ns** Not applicable. **ns** Not stated. **WTB** What to Buy models.

Viewing angle is important in kitchens or areas where you're moving about, and again performance varies, from very good to very poor. Scores in the table below left of 30% or less mean you only have to move a few degrees off centre before the image starts to lose colour and contrast.

Medium TVs (101cm-107cm)

This size remains very popular, and prices haven't changed dramatically over the past year. However, some features have started to appear that weren't common in our April 2011 TV round up, such as 3D capability and DVR functions.

The DVR functions are usually able to record current programs and set up recordings by time or from an electronic program guide, but you'll only be able to record one program at a time. Also, you'd have to supply the USB storage (or you can use an SD card for Panasonic TVs). Scores tend to be only OK or lower because a separate DVR will normally have more features and can have two tuners, which allows concurrent recordings. The scores for DVR are not included in the overall score.



If you want 3D, it's not hard to find a TV that has it. However, there's not much content around and no evidence that 3D broadcasts are likely to ever become common. It should only be a minor consideration when deciding on a TV.

At this size you should be looking at the characteristics of the room. These TVs are not portable and you'll need to take into account the brightness of the room when you're normally watching, as well as reflections from lights or windows. Plasma TVs have ▸

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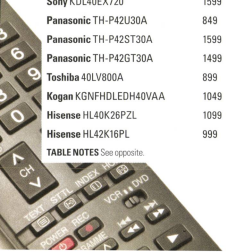
MEDIUM TVs		PERFORMANCE									SPECIFICATIONS			
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Broadcast TV viewing score (%)	DVD viewing score (%)	Blu-ray viewing score (%)	Sound quality score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Energy score (%)	Viewing angle score (%)	DVR score (%)*	Screen size (cm)	Screen resolution (pixels)	Backlighting type	3D-capable
Sony KDL40CX520 (WTB)	999	73	82	68	82	67	63	73	80	na	102	1920 x 1080	FL	
LG 42LW6500 (WTB)	1799	72	73	69	74	67	71	80	80	57	107	1920 x 1080	LED	✓
Samsung UA40D6000 (WTB)	1599	72	81	70	74	64	67	80	55	na	101	1920 x 1080	LED	✓
Samsung UA40D6600 (WTB)	2099	71	80	58	78	71	67	80	75	na	102	1920 x 1080	LED	✓
Samsung UA40D6400 (WTB)	1899	71	76	70	75	64	69	80	55	63	102	1920 x 1080	LED	✓
Sony KDL40EX520 (WTB)	1249	71	82	62	78	59	64	80	80	na	102	1920 x 1080	LED	
Sony KDL40NX720 (WTB)	2199	71	69	69	75	71	71	80	65	na	102	1920 x 1080	LED	✓
LG 42PT250 (WTB)	799	70	74	66	63	70	69	75	90	na	106	1024 x 768	Plasma	
LG 42LV5500 (WTB)	1399	70	71	63	71	66	71	80	80	57	107	1920 x 1080	LED	
Panasonic TH-L42E30A (WTB)	1349	70	69	71	81	68	65	85	40	68	107	1920 x 1080	LED	
Samsung UA40D5000	1199	69	77	61	74	65	67	85	50	na	101	1920 x 1080	LED	
Sharp LC-40LE820X	1899	68	76	62	69	70	59	80	70	na	102	1920 x 1080	LED	
Sony KDL40EX720	1599	68	66	69	66	66	65	80	80	na	102	1920 x 1080	LED	✓
Panasonic TH-P42U30A	849	67	61	64	72	68	66	75	90	na	106	1920 x 1080	Plasma	
Panasonic TH-P42ST30A	1599	66	66	64	62	63	67	75	90	67	106	1920 x 1080	Plasma	✓
Panasonic TH-P42GT30A	1499	65	65	61	55	61	71	75	90	67	106	1920 x 1080	Plasma	✓
Toshiba 40LV800A	899	57	47	59	67	46	61	75	60	na	101	1920 x 1080	ns	
Kogan KGNFHDLEDH40VAA	1049	56	50	62	54	53	55	73	60	53	102	ns	LED	
Hisense HL40K26PZL	1099	53	48	46	61	54	57	80	40	na	102	1920 x 1080	LED	
Hisense HL42K16PL	999	44	38	38	31	49	53	85	40	na	106	1920 x 1080	LED	

TABLE NOTES See opposite.



reflective screens and are generally not as bright as LCD TVs, but they usually have much better viewing angles. Plasma is a good choice if you normally watch TV in low light with the whole family spread around the room. However, if you're considering placing the TV in brightly lit areas or rooms with lots of windows, an LCD may be a better option. Be careful though – some manufacturers are putting reflective coatings on some LCD screens to help boost contrast.

Large TVs (117cm+)

Bigger isn't always better, and it seems the bigger TVs get, the harder it is to find a really good one. At this size, picture faults become more obvious, even at longer viewing distances, and all the top-scorers in this batch are at the lower end of the big spectrum (117cm). But it's also good to see there are no poor performers.

It's not unusual to find internet connectivity and networking features on TVs of this size, but some of the cheaper models may omit them or be very limited in these areas. If you have specific connection requirements it pays to check before you buy. The same can be said for normal connections to DVD/Blu-ray player or DVRs. The connections may be there but very difficult or impossible to reach if the TV is attached to a wall.

Sound quality for many of these TVs is OK or good, but price is no indicator of quality in this area. You probably won't need to worry too much if you're planning to always use a home theatre system for the TV sound, but many people use the TV speakers for watching news or similar programs, and poor sound generally means that voices will lose clarity.

As TVs get bigger they also use more power. Our energy scoring is based on the amount of power used in relation to the screen size, but if you're looking to minimise your power usage overall, a big TV is probably going to use more than you would like. LCD TVs generally use less power than plasmas, but they can also cost a lot more in bigger sizes. ■

LARGE TVs		PERFORMANCE										SPECIFICATIONS			
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Broadcast TV viewing score (%)	DVD viewing score (%)	Blu-Ray viewing score (%)	Sound quality score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Energy score (%)	Viewing angle score (%)	DVR score (%)*	Screen size (cm)	Screen resolution (pixels)	Backlighting type	3D-capable
Samsung UA46D7000LMXXY (WTB)	3199	71	72	70	72	68	71	80	55	63	117	1920 x 1080	LED	✓
Sony KDL46HX820 (WTB)	2699	70	73	70	71	71	68	80	50	na	117	1920 x 1080	LED	✓
Sony KDL46EX720	1899	69	67	69	75	70	67	85	50	na	117	1920 x 1080	LED	✓
Panasonic TH-P46GT30A	2299	68	67	64	69	60	71	75	90	67	117	1920 x 1080	Plasma	✓
Samsung PS51D8000	2599	68	72	62	64	68	66	70	90	64	129	1920 x 1080	Plasma	✓
LG 50PZ650	1299	67	67	64	60	64	72	75	90	55	127	1920 x 1080	Plasma	✓
LG 50PZ950	1999	67	67	65	61	63	71	75	90	55	127	1920 x 1080	Plasma	✓
LG 55LW9500	2699	67	72	61	64	70	72	80	40	58	139	1920 x 1080	LED	
Panasonic TH-P50GT30A	2699	67	70	63	68	45	68	75	90	65	127	1920 x 1080	Plasma	✓
Sony KDL46NX720	1999	67	68	65	71	55	67	85	60	na	117	1920 x 1080	LED	✓
Sony KDL55EX720	2799	67	69	59	75	67	67	85	55	na	138	1920 x 1080	LED	✓
LG 47LW4500	1599	66	67	65	65	55	72	85	50	na	119	1920 x 1080	LED	✓
Panasonic TH-P50X30A	1049	66	65	63	62	50	70	80	90	na	127	1024 x 768	Plasma	
Panasonic TH-P55ST30A	2599	66	65	63	63	53	72	78	90	68	139	1920 x 1080	Plasma	✓
Samsung PS51D550	1599	66	70	58	62	62	67	75	90	na	129	1920 x 1080	Plasma	✓
Samsung PS59D6900DM	2999	66	66	64	67	55	68	70	90	64	149	1920 x 1080	Plasma	✓
Sharp LC52LE830X	2299	64	68	56	68	69	60	85	50	na	132	1920 x 1080	LED	✓
Samsung UA55D6600WMXXY	3499	62	66	58	64	53	68	85	30	64	139	1920 x 1080	LED	✓

TABLE NOTES See page 66.

Live the high life

The arrival of affordable HD signals the end of standard definition video, says **Denis Gallagher**.

Buying a high-definition (HD) camcorder is a major financial commitment, with some of the top-performing models priced at well over $1000. However, only a couple of years ago you were expected to part with twice that amount to get a HD camcorder, regardless of the quality – and a sub-$1000 HD model simply didn't exist.

Today, there is a lot more choice. You can get a camcorder that will work well in all lighting situations for well under $1000 (see below). And if you're looking for a basic point-and-shoot model that will capture your memories in HD, you can pay as little as $500 for a camcorder that will perform well in most situations.

Which is which?

Hard-disk (HDD) camcorders have the largest capacity as well as the ability to add extra storage via removable memory cards. However, hard disks have moving parts that are susceptible to damage when bumped or dropped. **Memory (flash) card-only models** are generally the lightest and most affordable option, with all video stored on a removable memory card. But make sure your camcorder can handle the larger sizes before you buy as some can only support up to 32GB. **Combination internal and removable memory card camcorders** are the most popular option. Internal flash memory has fewer moving parts than hard drives and is also more compact.

WHAT TO BUY

$899

77%
Canon Legria HF S20

Good points

- 32GB flash memory and two SDHC card slots for additional storage
- Good autofocus and sound quality
- Good picture quality under all lighting conditions and very good for indoor shooting
- A video lamp – useful when shooting in dim lighting conditions
- Can convert HD video from one card to SD video on the other card

Bad points

- Battery that comes with standard kit doesn't last much longer than an hour

$1699

72%
Sony HDR-CX700V

Good points

- Excellent autofocus performance
- More than two hours' recording on a fully charged battery
- LCD viewfinder
- Has a night shot feature that can capture video in near-darkness
- Good picture quality under all lighting conditions and very good for daylight shooting
- GPS tagging feature (see page 71)

Bad points

- Image stabilisation is among the worst of the top-performing models on test

$1899

71%
Canon Legria HF G10

Good points

- 32GB flash memory and two SDHC card slots for additional storage
- Excellent autofocus performance
- LCD viewfinder
- Good sound quality
- Good picture quality under all lighting conditions and very good for low-light shooting
- Can convert HD video from one card to SD video on the other card

Bad points

- Macro performance not as good as the top-performing Canon

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Remote controls let you do most playback functions plus additional functions, some of which may only be available via the remote.

Video lamp/photo flash allows you to film or take still photos in low light.

Accessory shoe allows you to attach things such as an external microphone or video lamp to the camera.

An **input for an external microphone** usually provides better sound quality than a built-in one.

Dolby Digital/surround sound provides a home-theatre effect to your production.

Video transfer speed
Look for speed ratings on the SD memory card such as Class 4 or Class 6; the higher the number, the higher the speed. Cheaper memory cards may show a slower Class 2 speed rating and find it hard to write to the card when capturing video at HD quality.

An **optical image stabiliser** adjusts the lens position to accommodate unwanted camera movement.

HDMI All the camcorders on test will play both digital video and audio through a high-definition multimedia interface (HDMI), which provides the best possible audio and picture quality. However, you need a HDMI connection on your TV and/or home theatre system to enjoy the benefits. The HD camcorders on test also allow you to transfer video from the camera to your computer for editing or uploading video to the internet using a USB 2.0 connection.

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			PERFORMANCE												FEATURES			
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Sound quality score (%)	Versatility score (%)	Daylight score (%)	Artificial light score (%)	Low light score (%)	Autofocus score (%)	Image stabilisation score (%)	Macro score (%)	Still photo score (%)	Length of operation (mins)	Remote control	Video lamp/ photo flash	Accessory shoe	Dolby Digital/
Canon Legria HF S20	899	77	75	76	70	78	80	70	74	90	86	75	81	✓	✓/✓	✓	✓
Sony HDR-CX700V	1699	72	65	77	76	83	74	75	93	53	51	69	151	✓	-/✓	✓	✓
# Canon Legria HF G10	1899	71	68	73	67	75	71	80	100	63	45	69	113	✓	-/-	✓	✓
# Canon Legria HF M40	899	68	64	75	56	65	80	80	96	53	53	58	126		-/-	✓	✓
Canon Legria HF M300	549	67	68	63	64	60	70	50	62	90	91	59	96	✓	✓/✓	✓	✓
Canon Legria HF M31	699	67	68	63	69	60	70	50	62	90	91	59	96	✓	✓/✓	✓	✓
# Panasonic HDC-SD900	1399	66	72	56	71	75	70	50	100	40	33	71	108	✓	-/✓	✓	✓
# Panasonic HDC-HS900	1899	65	69	56	77	68	70	50	100	40	33	67	91	✓	-/✓	✓	✓
# Panasonic HDC-SD90	749	65	74	57	61	61	58	60	100	47	36	74	107		✓/✓	✓	✓
# Sony HDR-TD10E	2099	64	57	65	63	56	51	70	100	53	64	72	270	✓	-/✓	✓	✓
JVC Everio GS-TD1	1649	63	63	74	57	53	58	65	93	50	34	64	162	✓	-/-	✓	✓
Sony HDR-PJ30V	1299	63	63	61	65	64	60	60	100	40	57	61	146	✓	✓/✓	✓	✓
# Sony HDR-PJ50V	1499	63	63	61	65	64	60	60	100	40	57	61	146	✓	✓/✓	✓	✓
Sony HDR-CX110 BC	449	61	72	55	37	68	68	40	64	67	91	47	120		-/-		✓
Canon Legria HF R16	399	60	65	64	44	50	60	50	54	70	91	51	66		-/-		✓
Sony HDR-CX130E	499	60	61	83	39	60	51	50	95	33	54	56	143		-/-		✓
Sony HDR-PJ10	899	60	63	61	54	60	60	50	95	43	54	56	137	✓	-/-		✓
# Panasonic HDC-SD80	599	59	68	69	45	55	45	40	78	40	49	73	117		✓/-		✓
Panasonic HDC-HS80	899	58	65	69	49	55	45	40	78	40	49	72	117		✓/-		✓
Canon Legria HF R28	599	56	56	62	43	51	55	45	98	33	58	53	71		-/-		✓
# Canon Legria HF R26	479	55	56	62	40	51	55	45	98	33	58	53	71		-/-		✓
# Panasonic HDC-SD40	449	54	59	56	45	54	50	35	95	40	49	30	155		✓/-		✓
Samsung HMX-H300	449	54	52	47	40	69	58	50	86	43	58	56	153		-/-		/
# JVC Everio GZ-HM670	649	53	57	55	53	58	58	50	40	43	44	67	124		✓/		✓
# JVC Everio GZ-HM445	449	50	56	59	43	46	50	50	63	33	41	30	82		✓/-		✓

USING THE TABLE All camcorders on test support USB 2.0. All the models support HDMI output for watching video on a HD TV and all support AVCHD video format except the Samsung HMX-H300.
Scores The overall score is made up of: Ease of use: 25%; Sound quality: 15%; Versatility: 10%; Daylight picture quality: 8%; Artificial light picture quality: 8%; Low-light picture quality: 8%; Autofocus: 8%;

Bells and whistles

Sony has introduced some interesting features in its latest range, including the ability to **project your video** to a screen right from the camera. This feature is available on the HDR-PJ10, 30 and 50 models. We found that while the HDR-PJ10 delivers a clear video image if the camcorder is placed close to a screen or wall, it needs to be very dark to see much detail. You're better off hooking up to a large screen TV with an HDMI cable and enjoy the video at full HD quality.

Another feature you may find useful is the **GPS feature** available on the Sony PJ50, PJ30 and CX700. These camcorders have a GPS chip that records your position when taking video and includes the information as metadata in the video file. This can be posted on sites such as Google Earth, where you can click on the location for the video to play.

3D video is available on the JVC Everio GS-TD1, Panasonic HDC-HS900, SD900, SD90 and Sony HDR-TD10E. The Sony and JVC have two lenses incorporated into the body; the Panasonics include a lens attachment that you remove if you want to shoot in 2D.

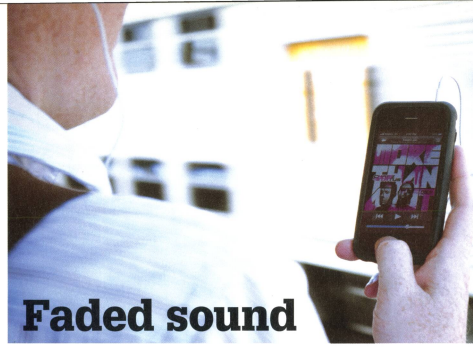
What is HD?

The camcorders on test can record video at a resolution of 1080i resolution, which can be shown at full quality on most new and recent TVs. Although standard definition video camcorders are still available, we wouldn't recommend them unless you're looking for something less than $300, and even then you might want to consider an HD pocket camcorder (*CHOICE*, October 2011) instead.

SPECIFICATIONS

Headphone socket	LCD viewfinder	AVCHD recording	Touchscreen	Optical image stabiliser	System	LCD monitor size (mm)	Weight (g)	Dimensions (cm, H x W x L)	Optical zoom	Removable memory type	Camera image resolution (megapixels)	Contact
✓		✓	✓	✓	Flash memory 32GB / memory card	89	508	9 x 7.5 x 15	10	SDHC x2	8	canon.com.au
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Flash memory 96GB / memory card	75	446	8 x 7.5 x 14	10	SDXC / MS Pro Duo	3	sony.com.au
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Flash memory 32GB / memory card	87	569	9 x 8 x 15	10	SDHC x2	2	canon.com.au
✓		✓	✓	✓	Flash memory 16GB / memory card	75	407	8 x 7 x 13.5	10	SDHC x2	2	canon.com.au
✓		✓	✓	✓	Memory card	69	372	8 x 6 x 12.5	15	SDHC	3.3	canon.com.au
✓		✓	✓	✓	Flash memory 32GB / memory card	69	372	8 x 6 x 12.5	15	SDHC	3.3	canon.com.au
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Memory card	87	454	7 x 7.5 x 14.5	12	SDXC	7.9	panasonic.com.au
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	HDD 220GB / memory card	87	510	7.5 x 7.5 x 14.5	12	SDXC	7.9	panasonic.com.au
		✓	✓	✓	Memory card	76	283	6 x 6 x 12	21	SDXC	2.6	panasonic.com.au
✓		✓	✓	✓	Flash memory 64GB / memory card	87	726	10 x 7.5 x 15	12	SDXC/MS Pro Duo	2.7	sony.com.au
✓		✓	✓		Flash memory 64GB / memory card	88	674	10 x 6 x 18.5	10	SDXC	2.9	jvc.com.au
✓		✓	✓	✓	Flash memory 32GB / memory card	75	390	7 x 6.5 x 13	12	SDXC / MS Pro Duo	1.9	sony.com.au
✓		✓	✓	✓	HDD 220GB / memory card	75	455	8 x 6.5 x 13	12	SDXC / MS Pro Duo	2.6	sony.com.au
		✓	✓		Memory card	67	260	6 x 6.5 x 11.5	25	MS Pro Duo	3	sony.com.au
✓		✓			Flash memory 8GB / memory card	69	320	7 x 6.5 x 12.5	20	SDHC	2	canon.com.au
		✓	✓	✓	Memory card	75	298	6.5 x 5.5 x 12.5	30	SDXC / MS Pro Duo	3.3	sony.com.au
✓		✓	✓	✓	Flash memory 16GB / memory card	75	360	7 x 6.5 x 13	30	SDXC / MS Pro Duo	3.3	sony.com.au
		✓	✓	✓	Memory card	67	233	5.5 x 6 x 11	34	SDXC	1.3	panasonic.com.au
		✓	✓	✓	HDD 120GB / memory card	67	304	6.5 x 6 x 11.5	34	SDXC	1.3	panasonic.com.au
✓		✓	✓		Flash memory 32GB / memory card	75	305	7.5 x 6 x 12.5	20	SDXC x2	3	canon.com.au
✓		✓	✓		Flash memory 8GB / memory card	75	305	7.5 x 6 x 12.5	20	SDXC x2	2	canon.com.au
		✓		✓	Memory card	66	210	5.5 x 5.5 x 11	17	SDXC	1.9	panasonic.com.au
			✓	✓	Memory card	75	278	6 x 6.5 x 12	30	SDHC	5	samsung.com.au
✓		✓	✓		Flash memory 32GB / memory card	67	231	5 x 5.5 x 12	40	SDXC	14	jvc.com.au
		✓	✓		Memory card	67	231	5 x 5.5 x 12	40	SDXC	1.3	jvc.com.au

stabilisation: 8%; Macro: 5%; Still photo: 5%. **Price** Recommended retail, as of November 2011. **TABLE NOTES #** Newly tested models.



Faded sound

Prices for MP3 players are dropping as they're overtaken by the smartphone wave, says **Matthew Steen**.

Nutshell

- Smartphones are taking over from standalone MP3 players in the media player market.
- You shouldn't expect to pay more than $300 for one of these, given in some cases they only do one or two things.

More and more people are using smartphones (see page 62) in place of standalone media players. As a result, MP3 players have dropped in price in the past few years, so now's a good time to snag a bargain.

Apple still dominates this market, with the Touch (which offers additional functionality via apps), Nano, Shuffle and Classic devices still available. We checked out the newly released Touch and Nano for this test and were unsurprised to see them score relatively well. In response to member requests we've also included some devices that only play audio.

We've changed our testing method to include a measured battery test on both audio and video playback, as well as drop and scratch tests for durability. Our audio test consists of listening to the MP3 player using both the supplied headphones and a good pair of after-market headphones. This means scores for previously tested players aren't directly comparable with newly tested models.

You shouldn't expect to pay more than $300 for a decent MP3 player – and much less for a no-frills player.

For details on how we test, which video file types the players claim to play and previously tested models, log on to choice.com.au/pmp

	Price ($)	PERFORMANCE						
		Overall score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Sound quality score (%)	Video display quality score (%)	Battery life score (%)	Durability score (%)	Measured battery
Apple iPod Touch (8GB)	219	72	75	67	63	86	71	5
Apple iPod Touch (64GB)	439	72	75	67	63	86	71	5
Apple iPod Nano (8GB)	149	69	70	67	(A)	64	85	3
Apple iPod Nano (16GB)	169	69	70	67	(A)	65	85	3
Philips GoGear Ariaz	140	67	73	70	57	61	74	3
Sony NWZ-S764	149	66	66	63	55	88	55	5
Cowon Plenue D3	440	64	60	53	85	53	89	2
Sony NWZ-E464	119	64	65	53	50	92	74	5
Sony NWZ-E465	149	64	65	53	50	92	74	5
Cowon C2	185	58	50	53	63	80	62	5
Cowon iAudio9	129	58	60	53	48	60	97	3
Creative Zen Touch2 (16GB)	200	56	59	60	60	29	77	1
Creative Zen Touch2 (8GB)	150	55	58	60	60	29	77	1
Philips GoGear Raga	70	47	59	40	0	73	94	4
Creative Zen Style M100	50	46	55	33	13	68	87	4
Creative Zen X-Fi Style	90	46	59	33	22	57	59	3
Creative Zen Style M300 (8GB)	80	42	55	33	13	62	21	3
Creative Zen Style M300 (16GB)	120	42	55	33	13	62	21	3
Sony NWZ-W262	79	39	29	57	(B)	27	83	1

USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up of: Ease of use: 40%; Sound quality: 20%; Video quality: 20%; Battery life: 15%; Durability: 5%. **Playback while recharging** means you can listen to music while the player is recharging when it's connected to the mains pow or your PC. **Can be used as a mass storage device** means you can plug the media player into a PC and have it appear in your system as a drive from which you can drag and drop files.

WHAT TO BUY

72%
Apple iPod Touch, $219 (8GB) $439 (64GB)

Good points
- Big screen
- Photo and video player
- Wi-Fi and Bluetooth
- Very long running time for audio and video

Bad points
- Relatively heavy
- Proprietary USB socket

$165 Average cost of MP3 players in 2011

$477 Average cost of smartphones in 2011

$100 Cost of Walkman tape player in the 1980s

FEATURES					SPECIFICATIONS				
videos (hrs)	Playback while charging	Can be used as a mass storage device	FM radio	External speakers	Dimensions (mm, H x W x D)	Weight (g)	Capacity (GB)	Resolution (pixels)	Contact
	✓			✓	111 x 59 x 7	103	8	960 x 640	apple.com.au
	✓			✓	111 x 59 x 7	103	64	960 x 640	apple.com.au
	✓	✓	✓		38 x 41 x 9	21	8	240 x 240	apple.com.au
	✓	✓	✓		38 x 41 x 9	21	16	240 x 240	apple.com.au
	✓	✓	✓	✓	94 x 51 x 10	66	8	320 x 240	philips.com.au
		✓	✓		98 x 44 x 8	56	8	320 x 240	sony.com.au
	✓	✓	✓	✓	117 x 65 x 12	119	32	800 x 480	cowon.com.au
		✓	✓		97 x 45 x 10	58	8	320 x 240	sony.com.au
		✓	✓		97 x 45 x 10	57	16	320 x 240	sony.com.au
		✓	✓	✓	54 x 79 x 13	84	16	320 x 240	cowon.com.au
		✓	✓	✓	95 x 43 x 9	41	8	320 x 240	cowon.com.au
	✓	✓		✓	62 x 119 x 14	116	16	480 x 320	au.creative.com
	✓	✓		✓	62 x 119 x 14	118	8	480 x 320	au.creative.com
	✓	✓			50 x 44 x 13	24	4	128 x 64	philips.com.au
		✓			56 x 45 x 13	33	4	128 x 128	au.creative.com
		✓	✓	✓	49 x 84 x 12	56	8	240 x 240	au.creative.com
		✓	✓		56 x 45 x 13	33	8	128 x 128	au.creative.com
		✓	✓		56 x 45 x 13	33	16	128 x 128	au.creative.com
		✓			(B)	31	2	(B)	sony.com.au

ity is in gigabytes – 2GB can store about 500 songs of average length, while roughly four hours of good-quality MP4 video will take up about **mpatible third-party software** Most media players can use Windows Media Player, which comes installed on Windows-based PCs. products use iTunes. **Price** Recommended retail, as of November 2011. **TABLE NOTES (A)** Doesn't have a display. **(B)** This product is a set of ones. **(C)** Doesn't play video.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Controls All media players on test allow you to fast-forward or rewind through some of your media files, but some have the main controls as easy-to-access buttons rather than buried deep within a touch-screen menu.

Rechargeable battery Most media players have a built-in rechargeable (Li-ion or Li-polymer) battery pack you can recharge from your computer's USB port or an AC adapter. Batteries generally charge faster from an AC adapter than from a USB port.

Inbuilt memory Media players with inbuilt flash memory can take more of a knock than models using a hard disk drive. However, hard drives are available with up to 120GB capacity, whereas flash memory tends to range between 8GB and 64GB.

Removable memory card support allows you to store photos and video clips and transfer them to a computer. You can also keep separate music/movie collections on multiple cards to use when needed.

Computer connection type A USB connection of any type allows you to transfer files to your computer. Some players use a commonly available mini or micro USB connection and can appear on the PC as an external drive.

Headphone connection A media player with a 2.5mm or 3.5mm jack will allow you to use a standard set of headphones to listen to music if you don't like the set it comes with.

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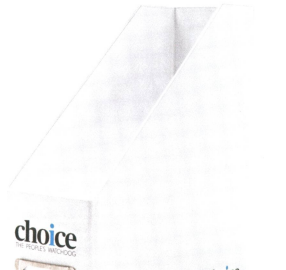

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Holier than thou

A school with a religious education program so effective your child grows up into Christ himself? How divine.

Hard Word

Crystal clear

We're not exactly sure what this LED shower head does either.

- Make The Flowing Into A Crystal
- Clear Sheen Freely Your Bathing
- Room Will Become A
- Dreaming-World With Sparking

Flushing out the competition

Bonus "retro stools"? We'll pass, thanks.

Beware of the dog

Avoid one of the hazards of pet ownership by following the cautions on this doggie drink bottle.

User's Manual
Don't use it for other purposes.
To avoid being eaten by your pet, be sure
To feed your pet with someone holdin
AVICO
PAWS & CLAWS
PET FEEDING BOTTLE
Portable
Suitable for small dogs and small fish, birds
500ml

Thanks this month go to Lionel Barnett, K Harrap, Shane Horton, Margaret Latham and Shelley Wilson. If you have any examples you'd like to share with other CHOICE members, send them with your full name to Hard Word, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW 2204. Please don't email us your entries – we need the unmarked originals.

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